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HE RAISED HIS BLUE EYES, FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE SHE H.
COME TO HIM, AND LOOKED AT HER. . . . HER WHITE
LIDS DROOPED, HIDING HER BROWN EYES' CONFESSION

Drawn by D. C. Hutchison (See page

THE HEART OF HER HIGHNESS

BY

CLARA E. LAUGHLIN

AUTHOR OF "THE SPENDING OF THE INCOME"

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
NEW YORK AND LONDON
The Knickerbocker Press
1911



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AUTHOR OF "EVERYBODY'S LONESOME," ETC.



G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
NEW YORK AND LONDON
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CLARA E. LAUGHLIN

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SOCIETY

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The Heart of Her Highness

CHAPTER I

"MAKE LIFE BEAUTIFUL"

THE spring of the year 1477 was yet young in Flanders. A winter of cruel rigour was scarce over; but every creature, every thing seemed trying to throw off the long oppression of misery, trying to forget the bitter past and to find life anew, and find it good in spite of all. Hovels and huts which had been barricaded against the cold, so that huddling humans and dumb brutes might lend of their bodies' warmth one to another, were open to the April sunshine—the beasts turned out to graze, the children to play. Old folks knelt in the great churches without suffering from the deadly, numbing cold. Young folks wandered in the byways and talked of love and of new homes

and of other sweet things that seem the birthright of all creatures when the world is full of spring.

The waterways of Bruges, long frozen, ran free under her hundred bridges; and beneath the nodding branches of low-hanging willow trees the swans, emerged from winter shelter, swam majestically, busy with family cares.

Within the city wall, not far distant from the gateway to Ghent, the little Lake of Love mirrored the soft beauty of earth and sky; and maids, as they passed the entrance of the Béguinage, marvelled how pulses could ever beat calmly enough to make life endurable in that tranquil retreat for women unsought and women bereft.

The tender new green of plumey trees, the blue of April skies reflected in her canals and rivers, softened the rich colourings of the queen city's palaces and public buildings with their wealth of gold decoration on façades of rose and russet tones. The streets swarmed with descendants of those burghers who, nigh on two centuries ago, had dimmed the splendour of a queen of France.

It was a wondrous day for a far-faring youth, deeply enamoured of beauty, to get his first

glimpse of this city whose fame for loveliness was as wide as Christendom.

"So much was told me," he said to his companion, a man thrice his age, "that I was fearful. I thought of the reports wily ambassadors bring back, extolling marriageable princesses. No maid was e'er so fair as she with whom shrewd men of state would wed their prince. . . . I fear to see what is so highly lauded. But of Bruges, no one has said enough."

"There are a few things in this world, my lord, more beautiful than any dream could build them. Sometimes it doth indeed take from our joy to have anticipation too much fed. But there are, too, experiences from which no man's advertisement can steal our glad surprise."

"God send me others!" prayed the youth. "But these be mean times to live in. All that men contend for, now, is power, and lands, and gold. I would that I had lived when the bravest and best foreswore all to go on great quests; when men reverenced valour and chivalry; and maidens gave their love to strong defenders."

His companion smiled with the indulgence of age for the impatience of youth.

"It might be," he said, "that even today a man could find that to do which savoured of romance. Where have you ever read or heard of a maiden who stood in worse need of rescue than the young Duchess of Burgundy?"

The young man shrugged disdainfully.

"Think you so? To me it seems that she but bargains shrewdly, as her father did for her before he died, to get the biggest price her hand can bring."

"I am told she clings to the belief her father will come again—that it was not his corpse they found, stark and frozen in the slime outside the walls of Nancy. She looks for his return—like the Emperor Baldwin, who was thought dead for twenty years and more, and then came back to Bruges——"

"And found his daughter ruling; and was hanged by her high on a gibbet between two hounds!"

"You think the Duchess Mary would do likewise?"

The young man laughed, shortly.

"I will not be unchivalrous," he answered. "But wolves do not breed lambs; and the young lady comes of a long line of those who got what

they wanted, when they could take it, without scruple of any sort that ever I heard of. But come! there's much that's pleasanter to talk about—and much to see."

They were threading their way through the thronged market-place, in the shadow of the great belfry of Bruges. The tongue they spoke was not that they heard most about them, nor was their wayfaring attire of Flemish or any neighbouring sort. But Bruges had been for centuries accustomed to traders and to pilgrims from all the world. It was not the strangeness, but the beauty of this youth that drew all eyes. He was stalwart built, and very fair. His skin was white and pink, his hair yellow as gold, his eyes blue as the April skies mirrored in the Lake of Love. He looked as 'twas told Lohengrin, the son of Parsifal, had looked when he appeared in his swan-boat, five hundred years ago, to Elsa of Brabant. Scarce a maid in the market-place but gazed after him longingly. But he seemed not to see them. He strode ahead, shouldering his way through the crowds till he came to that which was first among the things he had come to Bruges to see—the Chapel of the Precious Blood.

6 The Heart of Her Highness

For more than three hundred years, pilgrims had been coming here in countless thousands to worship a tiny vial of dark, ruby-coloured fluid believed to be drops of the water in which Joseph of Arimathea had washed the body of Christ when preparing it for burial. Around that vial, no bigger than a man's finger, had grown up a great civilization: architects had wrought and sculptors carved and painters limned and monks written and illumined to do reverence to the relic; crafts and trades and commerce, as well as arts and benevolences and learning, flourished on the veneration the relic inspired.

Hither came, in multitudes, the halt and maimed and blind, the sin-sick, the heart-broken—a never-ending procession of the repentant and of the afflicted. But this youth of the clear, blue eyes that had never known shame, of the clear, fair skin through which Health flaunted her rosy banners, of the stalwart frame and sturdy tread! Why was he here, shouldering his way through a crowd of bent market-women, maimed and decrepit men, pallid sufferers, road-stained pilgrims, and supplicants who looked as if no sacrificial blood could wash their guilt away?

The older man went rather reluctantly from the warmth of the spring sunshine into the cold crypt of the ancient chapel, but when he was within, he worshipped reverently. He was one of those who wear religion like a garment, for occasions, and he had other garments that he in the main preferred; but when he donned this, he wore it meekly, as one who made himself remember that he should need it in the supreme hour when his soul passed hence.

But the youth kneeling beside him was intent on life, not death. His soul, as he prayed, was stirred far less with gratefulness for the sacrifice which might make him finally acceptable before God, than with wistfulness to know such happiness as Count Theodoric must have known in bringing back to Bruges this inestimably precious vial. For he was steeped in the literature, the tradition, of knighthood, of the Holy Grail, of the Crusaders and all they typify of splendid gallantry. And what he prayed, in spirit, as he murmured the formal petitions was: "O God, make life for me brave and beautiful! Grant that I may do something glorious. I have strength; give me opportunity. I have courage;

give me a great test. I have zeal; show me a way to serve. I hunger to love nobly; protect me from ignoble barter."

It was dark in the little chapel, and very chill. The smell of mouldy damp mingled with the odour of incense and with other odours—from the clothes of fishwives and market-women, from the sores of the afflicted, and from many garlic-laden pores and breaths. The relic was shown on Friday morning only, and that being the great market-day, the attendance savoured always of the stalls and of country-folk, as well as of pilgrims. It was a strange company in which to pray, "O God, make life beautiful!" And though they who knelt there had, for the most part, been brave, it was not for such bravery the eager young soul prayed: bravery to dare and do, not bravery to endure and forego, was what he entreated for his portion. Yet all around him knelt the maimed wreckage of Duke Charles's wars, the scrofulous, starved victims of his merciless taxes, the widowed and fatherless whose protectors had laid down their lives for his conquests or in penalty for resisting his demands. But men took the misery of others for granted, in those days; and not even as they

worshipped the Precious Blood or fought to recover the Holy Sepulchre, did they think of the alleviation of suffering as a "brave and beautiful" career.

So the youth who prayed that he might find opportunity saw none around him. His thoughts were on the Holy Land, on Knights and Crusading armies flaunting the oriflamme. But he became, presently, conscious of intent scrutiny. Looking down, he saw beside him a pale, crippled lad of ten years, perhaps. The boy was gazing up at him with a rapt expression more eloquent than any words could have been; and his gaze smote the chords of memory. For, ten years ago, this stalwart youth had been a pale little lad—not crippled, although he had not walked till he was six years old; but sickly, undeveloped, backward. Early bereft of his beautiful young mother, he had been almost wholly neglected by his sordid old father whose mania was gold, and more gold, not to spend but to hoard. It was the grizzled warrior, now his inseparable companion, who, loving the frail, neglected boy, soon won his love, then led him to health, to vigour, and to zest for life. And out of the vivid memories of those hungry childhood years, he who now faced life so superbly

equipped, read the mind of the lad beside him. He smiled down into the uplifted, pale face, and was rewarded with an answering smile of wondering adoration. A glow of tenderness suffused the soul of the young man and shone in his face, making it supremely beautiful. He raised his blue eyes, shining with unshed tears and with the radiance of kindliness, and as he did so he looked full into eyes whose gaze, fixed on him, shook his soul as it had never before been shaken. They were brown eyes, full of golden gleams. They were eyes that saw visions, that followed after ideals. They were eyes that knew tears, and yet they looked as if they could be deliciously merry and teasing. Instantly they encountered his their lids drooped low, nor would they lift again; but in that flash, that fraction of a second, life had changed, had taken on a new meaning, had become a quest. Like the monk in the fable who, having wandered into a wood and heard a bird sing, was as strange among his companions when he returned to them as if he had been gone fifty years, he who had entered here wistful to become a sharer in the high emprises that he read about, now found himself as strange to that youth he

had been five minutes ago as to the puny lad he had been in years gone by.

"Make life brave and beautiful!" Was ever prayer so quickly answered? For the owner of those brown eyes knew his soul, and he knew hers. Something in the depths of her nature called to the deeps in his. Others had listened indulgently when he told his dreams, his longings. She would not need to have them told! She would know! Every maid whose eyes had looked on him heretofore had looked with evident favour on his comeliness and some (he knew) had sparkled also with appreciation of those great stores of gold his father was reputed to own. She had the look of a maid whose love neither beauty nor wealth could win; whose heart yearned, even as did his own, for splendid adventure—for great daring and great enduring.

The little, pale lad continued to gaze raptly up into the glowing face of his new idol; his prayers were, doubtless, that St. George or the Blessed Virgin or some other intercessor, would cause him to become like this so-wonderful stranger.

But the stranger was himself entranced. He

got no other glimpse into the brown eyes; but he knew, in some subtle way, that he was agitating their owner only a little less than she was agitating him. When she left the chapel, he rose abruptly and followed her.

She was attended by one evidently a serving-woman. They walked quickly down the short street to the Dyver and along its tree-lined quai. Within five minutes they had disappeared through a gateway in a high wall.

"You frighten the little lady," panted the elder man, breathing hard in the swift pursuit. He was tolerant of youthful fancies, but there were some things he had forgot. He was no longer able to tell when a little lady was hastening because she felt she ought to, and not because she wanted to get away. Only the heart of youth can divine such distinctions.

When she had slipped through the gate, her pursuers had no alternative but to stand there gaping or to turn back; for the high wall whose small gate had opened to receive her, blocked and made an *impasse* of the quai.

Raising their eyes, the strangers saw that they were under the shadow of Notre Dame's great

spire, the loftiest and—to many minds—the loveliest in all Europe. The church could not be more than fifty yards away, within that enclosure; doubtless the little lady's refuge was a nunnery; but doubtless, too, she was not yet a nun, although she was quite heavily veiled. A novice, perhaps? But the woman with her was not like a mistress of novices; and, too, would a novice be allowed to go, with one attendant, to worship in the Chapel of the Precious Blood? More like, the lady was a convent guest. Those eyes did not speak of renunciation, of the cloister. If ever eyes pleaded to find life sweet and good, they did.

Inquiry of several persons on the quai brought no information, for they understood and spoke only their own Flemish tongue. So, momentarily baffled, but not in the least dismayed, the seekers retraced their steps along the river bank.

CHAPTER II

A PRIMROSE FINDS A HIDING PLACE

BEHIND the high wall, in a garden colourful with the first blooms of spring, a lady paced the paths. She was young—three and twenty—and dressed all in the white mourning of a royal widow.

When the postern opened, and the two fugitives entered, she stared at them in surprise not without admixture of fright.

"Mary!" she exclaimed. "Where have you been?"

She was like an adoring elder sister to the girl-sovereign—this gentle stepmother who had come from England nine years ago, a mere child of fourteen, to be the third bride of Charles the Bold. During those years, the great warrior duke had been much away, at his wars of conquest. But even when he was with them in one of his various capitals, he had so little in common with these

idealistic girls that they were dependent on each other for their closest companionship. If it had occurred to the rash duke that he would soon be defeated and done to death, he might well have allowed himself some grave anxiety as to what was to be the fate of Burgundy in the hands of two sentimental girls. But he was far from foreseeing the imminence of their reign, when he set out upon that last great campaign of his which was to make it impossible for the German Emperor longer to refuse recognition of Charles as the King of Belgian Gaul.

Mary slipped her arm through Duchess Margaret's, and kissed her on the cheek.

"I have been to church," she said demurely. But there was that in the lilting tone of her voice, in the glad shining of her eyes, which did not strike Margaret as wholly devotional.

She shook her fair head, trying to be grave and maternal.

"It was ill-advised, dear."

"To go to church?"

"To go unattended—or with only Freda. You could have gone here—" nodding to Notre Dame's vast bulk.

"And sat in Louis's gorgeous new tribune, screened from all eyes. I know! But my heart was heavy with real supplication. I wanted to go to St. Basil's Chapel, to venerate the Precious Blood and make my petition in company with others who are distressed."

"Mary! Among that throng of sick, of penitents! And Louis so fearful for your safety that he hides you here."

"None knew me—I was veiled," the girl protested. "And none but Louis's household knows I am in Bruges."

Margaret's grave look continued. She dismissed Freda, with a nod, and looked about her cautiously to see if they by any chance could be overheard.

"We do not know who is aware of our presence here," she urged. "The spies of Louis of France are everywhere. And that hawk, Guelders, watches your least move. Indeed, I think they all do! We are never unobserved. It would not surprise me if, at this moment, the secret agents of a dozen kings and emperors and princes were to rise up from out these lily-borders and crocus beds, confronting one another and confounding us."

Her voice was bitter, but resigned. Although only three years Mary's senior, she was a full generation older in the sad wisdom of maturity. Long before she was Mary's age she had schooled herself to accept whatever was imposed upon her by wills she had no power to resist; and to satisfy her soul secretly in those flights of mystic adventure which none could deny her.

Mary, although the only child, the only pawn, of a man whom ambition made terribly absolute, had never yielded her dream of making circumstance, not yielding to it. She had been betrothed, when she was ten, by proxy, to the German Emperor's son, a sickly child reputed semi-idiotic. But as the years went by, less and less was said of this troth, and Mary was never seriously perturbed about it. There was always, while her father lived, the possibility of a male heir to succeed him, to carry on his wars and his ambitions. There was always the possibility that Mary would be relatively unimportant enough to choose what pleased her.

Then came the couriers from Nancy with report of Charles's death in battle; and Mary with her wistful dreams became the richest prize in Chris-

tendom, the greatest heiress Europe had ever known; greedily sought, schemingly pursued by every marriageable prince and duke and earl in twenty kingdoms.

"I hate them all!" she cried to Margaret, passionately. "Let them listen, and tell their horrid masters—I hate them all! I will not be gobbled, like a succulent bone, by the hound that is able to beat off all the others. I am Duchess of Burgundy! I will suit myself!"

Gone from her brown eyes were the golden gleams; they were tear-filled, and the tears were both angry and self-pitiful. But Margaret, who had lived and learned, knew that the anger was nowise strong enough to be availing, and that self-pity is more futile in royal breasts even than in any others.

"Mary," she entreated, "you kick against the pricks, dear heart, as if you had been born outside a palace. I tell you, there is no use in it."

The April sun, climbing toward zenith, warmed the last chill zephyr in the Gruuthuuse garden and tempted the two girls, who had been walking up and down the paths, to try the comfort of a bench whence they could watch the Dyver as

it flowed beneath an archway under Louis's house.

Mary had opened her heavy, dark cloak, and the delicate prettiness of her slight form was half revealed and half suggested by her tight bodice and wide flowing skirt.

She was small—of slight stature—but without hint of leanness. Her girlish bosom, held high by stiff stays, was softly round. Her tiny hands, faintly rosy in their colouring, gave just so much hint of plumpness as is needed for dimpled knuckles. Her hair, drawn tightly back from her pretty brow and veiled by her head-dress—half cap, half hennin—of crisp white organdie, was of a fair brown, the charming colour that succeeds to flaxen as maidenhood succeeds to adolescence. Small was the mouth of Mary and full of winsomeness—a mouth made for sweetest coquetry. And greatest beauty of all she had was her skin, as lovely in texture as an exquisite pearl, and as seemingly translucent. To see it was to know all but unconquerable desire to touch it, softly, with caressing finger and then with caressing lips.

The dress she wore this morning was of such material as the simplest maid in Bruges, almost,

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know. I am Duchess of Burgundy, and I will be told!"

There was majesty in the small figure; there was majesty in the soft voice; there was majesty in the spirit of this girl. Generations of power, of splendour, of hauteur, were potent in her blood. Margaret of York had never felt one moment of such imperiousness. She bowed to it in Mary, as she had bowed to it in Charles the Bold.

"'Twas never with me as with you, dear heart. There were so many of us, and our house not sovereign but striving so to be. I never had my young hopes else fed than with what might bring fortune to the House of York, discomfort to Lancastrians. I was a nursling, almost, when my father fell at Wakefield, and his head, mockingly crowned with paper, was set upon the walls of York. You know my mother's pride and love of power. She had great hopes for Edward when she had seen him crowned—hopes for some powerful alliance which should help him hold his throne. When he succumbed to the mature charms of a squire's widow, Mother was like to die of anger and chagrin. Then, more than ever, we others needs must wed for York's stability—Clarence with the daughter

of the kingmaker, Gloucester with the widow of Lancaster's heir, and I with Burgundy. We never thought it might be otherwise. And, you know, but for Duke Charles's aid and for the help Louis de Gruuthuuse lent in ships and men, my brother had never regained his throne from Margaret of Anjou—fighting the battles of her witless lord."

"I know—I know!" Mary shook her coifed head impatiently. "You tell me what I know full well. But what I seek to learn, you guard from me. You were too little when you came here, a bride of scarce more than a dozen years, to have had unrequited passions or dreams unfulfilled in England. But here, Margaret! Here? While Duke Charles fought for Alsace and Lorraine and against the Swiss, did never dream of love, real love, disturb thee? Didst never see a man who set thy pulses beating? Who could make of being an ecstasy, and fill thy soul with tumult of mingled joy and sadness? Did sense of duty feed thee full? Did panoply o'erlay the need of love?"

"I give no hospitality to such thoughts," Margaret replied with dignity. "The royal women

who have sighed for love have come to sad mischance. King Hotspur's widow and her Grace of Bedford were none so blissful in their matings with squires. And mine own brother, England's king, who wed for love and not for policy, seeks company of such as Jane Shore, as though his marriage had been one of state. 'Tis best to lend the body, dear, to what must be, and to withdraw the soul in contemplation of things spiritual."

"Nay!" Mary cried. "We're worlds apart. I am all for life, and thou'rt for the hereafter. I love thee, dear, but care not for thy counsel."

Dame Margaret sighed. She knew the strength of the bars Mary beat against, and how bruised and sore a captive thing can be e'er its strength is spent in futile beating.

Half petulantly and half lightly, Mary kissed her and went toward the house, stooping on her way to gather a primrose which she first kissed then tucked away in her warm, sweet young bosom beneath her gown.

"The springtime is in her blood," Margaret reflected, watching. "Poor child!"

The custom of the country, touching primroses,

was that maidens hid those modest flowers in their bosoms, as Mary had done, for the favoured lover to pluck out.

But such tender play was not for royal duchesses.

CHAPTER III

"I WILL LIVE YOUNG LIFE"

BRUGES was no longer, in Duchess Mary's day as in her grandsires', of paramount commercial importance. The silting up of her harbour deflected from her the multifarious ships which aforetime had made her the greatest maritime power in northern Europe and rivalled in all the world by Venice alone. The migration of the Flemish cloth-weavers to other lands had decreased the number of merchants who must buy in Ghent or Ypres or Courtrai and whose purchasing had once made Bruges the financial centre of western Europe, fixing the rate of exchange for the moneys of the trading world.

But the splendour of Bruges as a city, as a seat of learning, as a centre of art, still drew the beauty-loving and the pleasure-seeking of every nation. For more than five hundred years before Mary's

time, Bruges had been a favourite place of refuge for royalty driven from its own land; and it was scarcely less favoured by great personages on pleasure bent. If one did not care to avow his interest in the fashions, the gayeties of Bruges, he could declare his need of studying her art and civilization, or he might go as a pilgrim to her shrines.

If one were a 15th century young man of Austrian birth, only son of a rich sire, and brimming with romanticism and the love of chivalry, one would get, somehow, first of all to Venice; and then, having feasted full on her glories and her memories, one would proceed, somehow, to Bruges—stopping, of course, in Paris to venerate the Crown of Thorns in Louis's so-exquisite Sainte Chapelle, and to see, incidentally, whatever else Paris might have to offer such a young man, fresh from Venice by way of Provence.

Frederick of Falkenhorst found many excuses for travelling. He and his father had few sympathies in common, and life under the parental roof was exceeding irksome to Frederick, whose continual lament it was that he had been born in an age with which he was sadly out of tune. Nor had he any fancy for his father's mantle which, in

all probability, he must some day wear. The things his father fought for, with sword and craft, seemed to the son so mean beside the things men had contended for when Baldwin and Theodoric and Richard of the Lion Heart and saintly Louis of France had had their glorious day. A taste for making poetry had Frederick—as well as desire to live it—and a pretty gift of song. In the days of troubadours, at the courts of Love, he would have been a commanding figure, with his tall beauty and his winsomeness. Or, he could have fought well as a Crusader, wresting some sacred relic from the infidel Saracen. But to quibble and to quarrel about a foot or two of territory, only to have it twisted from you by some sudden trick; to barter for some small advantage, only to find yourself balked of its enjoyment; to know no relationships in life save those which looked for profit this way or that—this fretted him to frenzy. And when he found that his father was bargaining him in marriage, taking for granted that he would have no more to say about it than the bale of wool a stapler sold, there was an issue 'twixt generations.

"Sire," said Frederick, wrathfully, "I have no

taste for the thing that I was born to. An' I followed mine own will, I would have none of it—but go to rouse the world again to chivalry. I am all thou hast, to keep together, after thou art gone, thy hard-come-by possessions. I will yield thee, if I must, my grave maturity—but not my youth. When age comes creeping on, and my joints creak, and the moon stirs not my pulses with desire for love; when springtime taunts no more mine ears with mating-song of birds, and I can sit and nod o'er books of poesy—then, sire, I will exchange thee what is left of my life for what is required of me. I will sit, dull days, grasping at my possessions. I will give my wakeful, weary nights to scheming for some new advantage. But while I am young, I tell thee I will live young life—will roam, and see, and dream, and store me memories for those lean, hungry years when I succeed thee."

Partly because young Frederick was of no immediate need or use at home, and partly because his father had much indifference toward him, the young man was allowed to go and do as he desired. Meagre was the outfitting he got, but he was better suited so than if his father had insisted on more ceremony. Only old Franz the armourer was with

him as his squire—old Franz, who had tempered steel, and thrust it, too, in many wars; and who knew Europe well, from Cadiz to Cracow, and from Sicily to Scandinavia. Franz did, indeed, creak somewhat in his well-worn joints, and lacked a little of youth's thrill when the moon shone on Venice or a nightingale sang from a copse near Petrarch's house at Avignon; but he had many enthusiasms left, and his ardour for the great old days now past and gone was great as Frederick's own. So they were happy in each other's company, and had come romancing through many lands to Bruges, to look upon its loveliness; to venerate the Precious Blood; to see how its Van Eycks and Memlinc compared with Giotto and Masaccio and Fra Lippo Lippi; and, not least, to browse in the renowned library of Louis de Gruuthuuse.

Louis was the richest citizen of Flanders, the host of kings and splendid patron of the arts. He was Governor of Holland, Earl of Winchester, Knight of the Golden Fleece and of the Garter, and favoured counsellor of his sovereigns for more than a score of years. His palace with its treasures was the seat of the most princely hospitality in northern Europe.

Private libraries were still few. Even royal libraries were not many. But Louis had been one of the first patrons of printing, one of the first collectors of books as done after Gutenberg. Every lover of learning knew of his treasures.

Balked in his pursuit of the demoiselle, by the high garden wall which he thought might shield a nunnery, Frederick retraced his steps along the Dyver; and, inquiring for the palace of Lord Gruuthuuse, was presently directed to an imposing gateway.

Feudalism—every man's house his castle, and its defendability its chief requisite—gave way nowhere more readily to the monarchial and national ideal than in Bruges, where the love of luxury had for centuries been so strong that men welcomed the new idea which relegated protection to the state and dispensed with drawbridges in favour of entrances like this, flaunting a different sort of power.

Frederick's right to enter was not challenged. He was admitted readily into the base-court around which the various wings of the palace spread, and the doorway through which the library was entered was pointed out to him.

The librarian received as a matter of course

Frederick's application for permission to see the books and manuscripts; and bade him within. He was a musty, dusty man, like the tomes in his keeping—his skin like yellowed parchment, his clothes like the brown binding of the early books.

His domain was impressive, but not inviting; its atmosphere seemed to embalm the old idea that bookishness was for the few and those the inactive. No man was able, yet, to foresee the relation of printing to democracy.

The breath of Spring had not entered here. Frederick misdoubted if the withered brown man knew winter was past—nor cared.

Here and there in the dimness, a limp scholar sat poring, perhaps over some chronicle of blood and valour, or some record of great love.

The room was chill; and in the dusk the wisdom of the ages lay as in a catacomb.

Frederick felt as if among the dead. The venerated past had never seemed to him before a thing in cerements. He had never known, till now, how beautiful the present might be.

He walked toward the far end of the long library, drawn past all the records of the days of chivalry—drawn by a window which framed a bit

of immortal spring. The panes were dusty; peering through them was like looking through smoked glass at the sun. But this was providential—for the window overlooked the Gruuthuuse garden, where two women, young and comely, sat on a bench and talked together earnestly. Then, up rose one, her face like April's self with swift-succeeding rain and shine, and plucked a primrose for her bosom.

Seeing this, the blood leaped in Frederick's veins; and suddenly he knew that, as for him, he would rather take that primrose from its resting place, than go to fight for his Lord's Sepulchre, or find and fetch the Holy Grail.

CHAPTER IV

"THOSE DESTINED FOR IMMORTAL LOVE"

FOR a moment, Frederick closed his eyes, and the hot flush faded from his face and brow, leaving him pale as death. Some there be who, thinking themselves wise, scoff at the love which kindles at first sight; but others, wiser yet, acknowledge divers wonders which they cannot understand—instant attraction among others still more strange. Youth walks close to the seemingly impossible, at all times, and meets miracles with ready faith. Frederick was not surprised that this had happened to him nor that he knew it at once for what it was. But he was awed at what he felt. Young though he was, he realized the tremendous seriousness of it as well as the divine ecstasy.

When he opened his eyes, she was gone. But he was no whit dismayed. He knew that he should find her—it was ordained from the foundation of

the world. What was to come of their love, he knew not, nor dared think; but that the love was to be great, in her heart as in his, he had all confidence. It had been so revealed to him, in one great flash; as if he had caught a glimpse, within the new Jerusalem, of that illumined scroll whereon are writ the names of those destined for immortal love.

"Franz, I have found her!" he whispered to his squire. "Do thou bide here until I come again."

"I gave thy father my sworn word I would not let thee from my sight," the squire pleaded. "And furthermore, my lord, my stomach cries for food. The hour of midday is nigh and we have not dined."

Sir Frederick thrust these protests of the old man impatiently aside.

"Find thyself food," he answered sharply, "or sit in yonder window watching me as thou hast sworn to do. I shall be in the garden."

A servant showed him how to reach it, but asked his warrant for entering, saying that Mevrouw Anna's orders were the garden must be kept quiet for her guests.

Frederick pressed silver in the servant's palm.

"Hast ever loved a lass?" he whispered.

A slow grin spread broadly on the serving-lad's heavy-featured face.

"Then lend me thy smock and sabots, and that tool thou hast for digging 'round the roots of plants."

"Nay, but I cannot go without my smock or shoon," the lad protested.

"Then hide thyself and let anticipation keep thee warm," Frederick replied, doubling his first bribe. "I'll come this way anon, and set thee free."

The brown blouse, like coarse sacking, did not ill-become the heir of Falkenhorst. The garden-boy's cap, with its long peak that wound, scarf-like, about the neck, was fair disguise for the so-yellow hair and unweathered throat. Scraping some loam from his wooden shoes, the lad smeared Frederick's white hands.

"'Twill do," he granted, "but most maids would like thee better in thine own livery. Their fancy runs to fair appearances."

"I'll take my chance," Frederick said, and was presently in the Gruuthuuse garden, which owed

little to natural advantage and as little to unusual arrangement, but was very fair to see because of its multitude of tender-coloured blooms.

Flat as a book's page was the garden space—flat with the flat flatness of West Flanders—but the bright greenness of the grass, and the pale pinkness of the hyacinths and crocuses and primroses, recalled to Frederick some of the pictures of Fra Giovanni the Angelic in San Marco's monastery at Florence, wherein the earth seems fitly carpeted for the feet of Christ our Lord.

The lady, all in white, who had been sitting on a bench not too well shaded from the genial sun, rose, as he bent near her, and went toward the house. About her there was that which bespoke accustomedness to deference.

She was uncommon tall and moved with easy grace. Nothing about her was imperious; the stooping stranger read her for one who gave few commands and those gentle; who had by birth or other circumstance been wont to have her minor wishes ceremoniously obeyed but her major desires unconsideringly denied.

As she passed him, he was conscious of a gentle pity for her—she seemed so frustrate. He won-

dered if she would glance his way; but she was wholly occupied with grave thinking.

When she was gone within, Frederick stood up and scanned as boldly as he dared the windows of the mansion. Mindful that from any of them he might be observed and thought to act suspicious, he stooped often to the tulips and the white, star-shaped narcissus flowers.

He could not tell why he felt sure that she would see him and come out. But so his heart assured him—and even so she did.

He saw her at a window, briefly. A few moments later she was coming toward him on a garden path, and his heart was thumping against his ribs like a monstrous strong bird seeking to escape its cage.

She was coming closer! The folds of her trailing white robe rippled with the movement of her limbs. The little pale flowers of the crocus seemed to spring up, in the grass, to greet her progress.

Grateful for the guise he wore, making his humble posture inconspicuous, Frederick fell upon his knees. His eyes he durst not lift above her girdle. His head was bowed. He waited.

"I saw thee," she began, most timidly. "Thou

wert, an hour since, at worship in the Chapel of the Precious Blood."

"My lady, yes."

"Art stranger here?"

"Again, my lady—yes; from southern Germany. I have not been to Bruges before. I came from Ypres last evening."

"To supplicate?"

"My lady, there be many kinds of supplication. I, as you will see, am neither halt nor maimed, nor am I blind. I have no ailment in my body, which is young and strong, nor have I soul-sickness nor great anguish of mind. Yet was I supplicant today. And scarcely had the words of my entreaty left my lips, than lo! my prayer was answered. As straightly as the man who rose, took up his bed, and walked—having been lame from birth—did I, asking, receive, and come forth to a new life."

"Tell me," she murmured. "Hark! Lest we be overlooked from one of these windows that do always gape, I will sit here, on this bench, as if ruminating. And do thou bend above thy hyacinths, telling me how thou camest hither and—if thou wilt—what was so straightly granted thee."

"I came because I saw thee enter," he replied. "And what was granted me was this: I prayed, 'O Lord, make life, for me, brave and beautiful!' And then, I lifted up mine eyes and knew my prayer was answered."

He raised his blue eyes, for the first time since she had come to him, and looked at her. Again, as in the chapel, her white lids drooped, hiding her brown eyes' confession.

"How—how came th' assurance?" she whispered, bending toward him.

"My lady, it is hard for me to tell; but, on a sudden, I knew life is very beautiful—so beautiful I must be brave."

"Dost think we must be brave to—to know how beautiful life is?"

"I know it, lady. Mayhap not for all, but certes for me. Nor would I have it otherwise. No great joy comes, I trow, to any soul except it has been won by hardihood and steadfastness. First, in a vision, we see what we most desire. Then, recking not the price we pay in sacrifice and suffering, we attain to it. Thus do we find life good. I had dreamed dreams, times past, of knighthood and chivalry restored, and myself a knight seeking,

like Galahad, the Holy Grail, or fighting the Turk for our Lord's Sepulchre; I was unhappy because the world seems to care no longer for these things, and I know no others so well worth caring for. Lady, I have had my vision, now; my loins are girt, my heart set unswervingly. Tell me, I pray, where I may see thee presently."

"Towards sundown," Mary said, "look thou beneath this bench whereon I sit, and find there a key. It will unlock the tribune of Lord Gruuthuuse in Our Lady's church. Yonder in the north transept is a small door which gives upon this garden. I, being of this household momently, can have access thereto. An' thou wilt hide thyself in the recesses of the tribune after dusk has deepened in the great church, I will come there."

Sir Frederick kept his head bowed low. He still was on his knees among the tender blooms of spring.

"Lady, I thank thee," he murmured. "I shall be there."

CHAPTER V

"A MAID IN SUCH SORE NEED"

THE private withdrawing-room of Lord Gruuthuuse was sumptuously furnished. No king in any country owned tapestries more magnificent than those choice products of the famed looms of Flanders which hung on these walls. And although floor coverings were still rare, even in palaces, a priceless Persian carpet adorned the floor, softened footfalls and voices, and gave the room that air of retirement which breeds intimacy. The ceiling was of dark, Flemish oak, like the window casings, the doors, and the high chimney-breast; and its beams were richly polychromed in red and blue and gold.

Over the fireplace the Gruuthuuse coat of arms was painted in gold and colours; and on the ample hearth, this April midday, a small fire of logs burned just bright enough to keep the air from being at all chill.

The furniture, of dark oak, was superbly carved. The room, in truth, was over-lavish, over-magnificent, at every point. But Louis de Gruuthuuse was more rich than aristocratic, and under necessity of making his money felt.

In person, he was not impressive, and but for the richness of his attire and an indefinable something in his manner which insisted on notice for him, might easily have been mistaken for any of the comfortable burghers of Bruges. His figure was of an insignificant framework paunchily overlaid with the effects of too much eating and drinking and too little activity. His principal feature was a bulbous nose. Yet Louis was not at all grotesque. He was not so learned as his library might have seemed to argue. He was not so accustomed to elegance as were scores of men who paid him obsequious deference. But he had great meed of power, none the less. Philip the Good had owed much to Louis; and service inestimable, also, had he rendered to Charles the Bold. Edward of England owed his throne not less to Louis's counsel than to Louis's ships and men, and had made him Earl of Winchester. The shrewdness which had made Louis rich was of a

big, bold, constructive kind which served well in statecraft as in money-getting. And years of winning respect for his sound judgment had bred in him a certain air of conscious power.

His reverence for royalty was very great. He might advise, almost command, its feebler intelligence; but his veneration for long lines of the blood-royal was intense.

He bowed, now, before the duchess-dowager, as punctilious of her state as if he had been but her humblest courtier; yet his tone, while deferent, was strong with urging.

"I entreat your highness," he said, "to help me make plain to our princess how desperate Burgundy's need is."

Throned, in effect, in one of the stately, high-backed chairs which homes of dignity provided for prelates and other honoured guests, Margaret looked royal indeed. Her dress, voluminous and sweeping, was of white cloth lustrous as satin and trimmed in tailless ermine. Her collar of Venice needle-point was worth many times its weight in gold. A string of almost priceless pearls was about her throat. And the long veil depending from her high hennin was of cobweb-fine Flemish lace.

This room, during her residence here, was her withdrawing-room and Mary's; and she received Gruuthuuse as if he had come from afar to see her. Yet, back of all this formal state, there was that which Frederick had felt: a gentle spirit, little intent on things it seemed concerned with, and much denied of all that it greatly yearned for.

"I think," she answered with dignity, "the duchess is aware how great the need is——"

She did indeed think so; and yet she flushed to think how her words seemed belied by a primrose.

No one could well have blamed the young lady of Burgundy if she had not fully appreciated how grave her situation was. Bred to think of herself as the greatest heiress in Europe, the most-sought princess in history, she had been as little instructed in statecraft as if her august father had expected to live always. He was so young—only three-and-forty—and so bursting with energy and ambition and vigour and pride, that it was impossible for any one to think of him save as going on and on, for years indefinite. Then came the incredible story of his defeat and death, ending his siege of Nancy. And no sooner was the word of it gone forth, than everyone whom he had held in check

came upon his realm to strip it as the ghouls had stripped his poor, deserted corse.

The Burgundy he ruled was made up of many counties and duchies over which he and his forefathers had acquired sovereignty by conquest or by marriage, or by inheritance; its borders stretched from Zuyder Zee far down into south-eastern France and south-western Germany. Some of these provinces owed fealty to the German emperor, as the duke's liege lord, and some to the French king. But neither monarch was as rich as this great vassal, whose power they both feared above any other.

Now, Charles was one of those men of whom someone has said that they are like beech trees: nothing grows under them. He was generous to those who served him, easy of access to them, and had many of the lovable traits which endear a leader; but he was intensely self-willed, arrogant when opposed, and jealous of glory in any but himself. In consequence, when Mary was left fatherless, she was also left without a single tried and true general or statesman.

Her leaderless army was disbanded in confusion. And she had no diplomats who could help her

manage her international affairs without that behind them which might enforce their just demands.

Furthermore, Burgundy being made up of so many different peoples, there was no national ideal, but each race hoped and strove for dominance. And so no man could presage what a day might bring forth; those who were nursing secret seditions, and those who wished to be on the winning side whatever it was, were afraid to take any step that might compromise their chances.

It was evident that the princess, piteously unable as she was to hold her inheritance, must make immediate choice among the suitors for her hand—and her duchy—and put an end to the present uncertainty; even though she could not hope to do else than further embroil herself, no matter which one she chose.

These were they she was required to select from:

Years ago her father had affianced her to the young Duke of Austria, the German emperor's only son. But subsequent to this, the emperor had treated Duke Charles with strange indignity and the marriage was not pressed.

The King of France urged marriage between

Mary and the dauphin, a sickly child of seven. That meant a cheap and easy annexation of Burgundy to France. The Netherlanders among Mary's subjects would have none of this. And Louis XI. replied that if his offer was rejected he would be put to the trouble of taking Burgundy by the sword.

Those Netherlanders had of themselves two Holland candidates. One was a chinless, vicious youth, heir to Mary's kinsman, the Duke of Cleves. The other was Mary's uncle by marriage, that notorious Duke of Guelders whose atrocious cruelties were known to all Europe. For his inhuman treatment of his old father, this Guelders had been imprisoned by Charles, his brother-in-law, and had languished in a dungeon at Namur until the citizens of Ghent got him set free to oppose the French alliance and to found, through marriage with the duchess, a Netherlands kingdom able to defy France and Germany.

Besides these, the Duke of Clarence offered Mary his widowed heart and weak head and wine-palsied hand. And Clarence's unloving sister-in-law, Elizabeth, the English queen, intrigued to crown those brilliant marriages she had made for

her family by wedding her eldest brother, the Earl of Rivers, with the heiress of Burgundy.

Others there were, also; but the balance seemed to lie between Guelders and the dauphin—a sorry choice! But none of them all entailed anything save ruthless sacrifice of that wistful girl with the primrose in her warm, sweet bosom, and the immemorial ardour for love in her great golden-brown eyes.

The turbulence of the court at Ghent had been so great, latterly, that Louis de Gruuthuuse brought the duchesses on this semi-secret visit to Bruges; having them as guests in his household, because if their presence in the royal palace were known they would immediately be again in the thick of that intrigue which made it so difficult for them to think.

Gruuthuuse was too shrewd a courtier to espouse any cause until he felt reasonably assured of its triumph; he had too much at stake to antagonize the new consort, whoever he might be.

"The situation," he murmured, "is most exceptional. So much depends on her highness's decision, that no one can blame her for deliberating. Meanwhile, though, the armies of her august godfather, King Louis, menace our borders."

"And in my late lord's whole domain," cried Margaret, "there is no arm to lift a sword in Burgundy's defence!"

Gruuthuuse cleared his throat, and looked suggestively at the duchess-dowager's ladies in attendance.

She motioned to them to withdraw out of earshot, and Louis signed to his secretary and his page to do likewise.

"There is," he answered in a low tone, "one who could. . . ."

"That hawk!" she said, shuddering.

Louis shrugged his thick-set shoulders.

"Madame," he reminded, humbly, "he who would live, in these days, and hold his possessions, must often do that which is or seemeth cruel. There were many—I crave your highness's pardon!—who thought on our late prince as you think on Guelders. Yet your highness knows how gentle such an one can be toward his wife."

Margaret stiffened haughtily

"My lord," she replied with dignity, "was a generous and most noble prince. There is between him and Adolph of Guelders no comparison."

Louis bowed low.

"There is this, your grace," he ventured; "they both, like all princes that ever I heard of, were impatient to reign; and, being so, were unfilial. Many there be, in these Netherlands, whose contention is that Guelders was not so much more lacking in a son's devotion than our late duke was; and do broadly hint that our duke might not have been so outraged by his brother-in-law's impiety, had he not seen therein a way to annex Guelderland."

"Enough!" Margaret ordered. "I will not hear such things."

"Your highness," Louis replied, "may stop your ears, and my mouth also. But you cannot stop all that is being said in Burgundy; and it seemed to me my duty was to let you know."

"Do you, then," she asked, "counsel me to urge this choice upon the princess?"

"I urge nothing, madame. My desire is only that the Lady of Burgundy may have such knowledge as I can give her, how her subjects feel—it being, I take it, to please them and not herself that she will wed."

"I thank you. I will tell her," Margaret said. "And I pray God may help her. For I never knew, before, a maid in such sore need."

CHAPTER VI

IN OUR LADY'S CHURCH

THE darkness in the great church was awesome. Before the Host on the High Altar, a ruby light burned in a lamp of exquisitely wrought gold; and here and there white votive candles, lighted at evensong, sent upward little tongues of orange flame in front of a shrine. But, save for these feeble rays, the thick blackness was unpenetrated.

Groping and stumbling, a little hooded and cloaked figure made slow, careful progress in the north transept toward the stairs leading to the magnificent new tribune of Louis de Gruuthuuse, whence that rich citizen and his illustrious guests could look, screened off like royalty, down on the worshippers and on the celebrants.

Crouched, waiting, in the tribune's safest corner, Frederick heard her soft footfalls and, presently, the sharp, frightened intake of her breath.

Now her hand fumbled for the latch of the tribune door. And now the door was open, and she was clasped close in powerful arms, her heart beating furiously against another not more calm.

No word was spoken for a space so long that ere it was done the strangeness of this, her first embrace, had given place to a sense of deep security—as if from all time this refuge had been destined for her, and from all time she had known it.

Frederick could feel the rigour of intense excitement leave her body. He was no more holding her, now, than she was clinging to him—muscles relaxed, breath coming softly, heart quiet. Her gladness and her faith could not in any words have been so well bespoken. She loved and trusted him, as her heart told her to.

By and by they sat down on one of the tribune's benches, like young lovers born to more carefree lot—his left arm circling her, her head upon his breast.

"Dear my lord," she whispered to his ear bent low, "let us thank God for this so-wondrous gift of His grace to us."

Together they slipped from their bench and knelt, but his arm still encircled her the while they prayed.

"Dost think," she asked, hushing her voice to the smallest murmur, "that we did wrong to come here, where Christ's Presence is, bringing our love?"

"Nay," he assured her, "rather I think we have done passing well. Nothing of all that I have ever known has made me feel so near to God as I do feel in loving thee. And here, where the Sacrament abides, I lift my soul to God and pledge that I will love but thee in time or in eternity."

So solemn was his manner, his tone, that Mary was frightened.

"There may be much to come between us," she said sadly.

Gravely he granted her that this might be. "But what can quench love? I will love thee ever and in all despite as Messer Dante of Florence loved his lady Beatrice. I do not even know thy name. I only know that out of all the world I was brought hither to give thee my heart's reverence and delight. I knew thee for God's gift to me, when I saw thee first. Love, being of God, is a high mystery—like life's self; we do not choose it —it is as God wills."

Mary sighed. "So, also, I knew thee, my lord.

Nor do I, for my part, know what men call thee, where thou hast residence, nor anything. All these be circumstance; that which wins love, or fails of it, is far, far else—none other than the spirit which no eye sees, only that of God, and Love's own. But I am much commanded, dear my lord, and little is accorded to my preference."

"The same is true of me," he said. "My father has wealth beyond any man's need. But he has greed of power. Power never yet fed any heart, that I have heard of, or brought any soul aught in Paradise. Yet men, to get it, will lay hold on Hell. All my life long I have dreamed of knighthood and of chivalry, of valorous deeds and a love pure and splendid. But my father's thought for me is that I scheme and strike to stretch the borders of my patrimony further to north or south, or east or west. I shall have great battle to do for my right to love. But I am glad. I welcome it. All my strength and all my skill shall be spent gladly to win you. Now, if thou wilt, tell me thy name, my Sweet. I am Count Frederick of Falkenhorst."

"I am the Lady Mary, an orphan maid," she

murmured, "and of the household of her grace the Duchess Margaret."

"Was't she, I wonder, that I saw, this morning in the garden ere you came?"

"Yes."

"She seemed very grave and sad. Loved she the late duke greatly?"

"That," Mary answered, "I know not, though I have often wondered. The English are something different from ourselves, I think—either more docile to circumstance, or else keep their own counsel better. My blood is chiefly French—and it runs hotter in the veins, or we are more frank to tell our feelings. The Duchess Margaret grieves dutifully. Also, she is anxious, full of fears. But whether her heart bleeds for the loss of its dearest treasure, or not, I cannot say. She hath much, poor lady, to wrinkle her lovely brow wherewithal, these days."

"Affairs of state?"

"Yes, many, and sore. In ruling she has had no experience, and the young princess is hard to guide in paths the policy of state demands. She is wilful, headstrong——"

"She comes by it honestly," Frederick answered.

"They say," Mary murmured, "her highness needs a husband—to lead her armies and to curb her will. Poor little maid! The greedy snatch and bargain for her, and each seeks to gratify through her inheritance his own ambitions. She's naught to any of them all. Yet I think she must desire love—even as I do. I would liefer sit here, feeling thy heart beat strong and true, than wear her crown and all her panoply—poor child!"

Frederick bent down his head and dropped kisses on her eyes, her soft cheeks, her lips.

"God's gift," he whispered, "I know thou hast dreamed, even as I have, long while of love—else thou couldst not have been so ripe for it, nor so quick to know it when it came to thee. But princesses, dear, are bred to dreams woven of different stuff. They suckle with their first milk, schemes of aggrandizement. It is the curse of royal blood. Kings give their souls for a few feet of ground—they snatch, and lose—they rob and then are robbed—lay waste and burn, then suffer these same when the tide of blood ebbs or flows. My soul is sick with loathing of their idols. Where in their whole number is one strong and earnest soul, coveting the glory of doing a great deed?

Your sweet pity for the heiress of Duke Charles does credit to your tender heart—but not to your judgment, Sweet. She's richer now than Crœsus, hath more lands than any woman ever ruled since time began. Why should she sell herself?"

"Ah, my lord," Mary cried, "you do not understand! It is not she who sells, it is they she is supposed to rule but who rule her. They call on her to check the advance of King Louis's army, sacking and laying waste. They call on her to put down the disquietude in Flanders and Holland wrought by mislike of the late duke's policies. They tell her she must not raise taxes nor make war except with the permission of a hundred deputies who terrify her with their guttural speech and their brows beetling with resentment of her father's deeds and her grandfather's. They made her, in effect, a prisoner in her own palace at Ghent, in February, and forced her to sign what they call The Great Privilege, in which she swore not to wed save with the consent of all those burly men. Think of it! And every day they dingdong in her ears: 'Wed! and beat Louis back. Wed! and buy Austria's aid. Wed! and make Netherlands a great kingdom, speaking the Flemish tongue,

governed for Flemish needs.' What think you they would say to her were she so rash as to plead her preference? 'Eh? Hold thy silly notion of what suiteth thee, against the safety and welfare of thy subjects? Because thou fanciest blue eyes above black, gold hair to brown, or likest a trick of speech, wouldst sacrifice the weal of thousands, allow Louis of France to burn cities and kill babes, or Guelders to start an insurrection far bloodier than Artevelde's? Shame on thee for a poltroon, a traitor!'"

"I give thy lady my deep sympathy," Frederick said, reverently. "In days of old, when knights were something worth, she should have had my sword to do her service—to beat back her thick-pressing foes and leave her free for love and happiness."

"She is Duchess of Brabant," Mary went on, "as Elsa was whom Lohengrin delivered from a similar plight. You, my lord, look as 'tis told in story he looked when the swans brought him to Elsa. Mayhap thou comest again from the abode of Parsifal, thy sire?"

"Nay," he laughed, "my sire is naught like Parisfal. Nor am I Lohengrin—I do not vanish

when you question me. But let us talk of thee and me, my Sweet, and not of royal duchesses. Hast any one to say thee nay when thy heart is won? When I have done my battle for my right, and have come riding back to fetch thee, shall I have need to fight for thee against a greedy uncle who has snatched thy patrimony, or a bad brother who has done likewise? Will Duchess Margaret oppose losing thee? Why art thou much commanded, thy preference made none account?"

Mary sat quiet, for a space, her head on his breast, her left hand stroking softly that sword-hand of his which with its muscles like Toledo steel held her right hand so-willing prisoner. Presently, not having answered yet, she bent and warmly kissed the fingers itching to grasp sword-hilt and do battle for her.

At that he crushed her more ardently to him, yet tenderly withal, mindful how small and soft she was. And there was no mistaking how sweet her content was to be thus held, close to a heart that for her sake would defy the world.

"Dear," she said, when she could command speech again, "I am counselled—almost I had said ordered—to accept suit of a man who—who

wears a noble name and a black heart. Daily I am told of the advantages he offers me—reminded how ill it becomes me to o'erlook them. I—tremble, sweet my lord. Even before I saw thee, and had only dreams, as maidens do, of one like thee who might make life beautiful for me, I was not meek when they I serve sought to 'settle' me. But now, although my heart beats for thee, and for thee alone shall beat through all eternity, I am more even than before afraid. What strength have I wherewith to battle for my love? What strength hath any maid—duchess or servant? Whither can we flee, escaping dishonour? I might turn mendicant, and make my way from house to house, with others outcast from homes! Or I could claim protection of Our Lady—in a nunnery! Else there is naught but to do as I am bid.

"They tell me love is youth's madness—a distemper. That for it none but fools forego the solid advantages. I have asked and asked, and no one tells me my own heart is right."

"Either they play us false," he cried, "or else they have forgot! I have not lived a thousand years, yet I have wisdom of some sort, I think. The greybeards wag and tell us we do not see far;

that we are so young, our eyes so little accustomed to the light, they needs must think and feel for us, decide if we shall die, like day-old puppies in a water bucket, or live to go hunting and raise families. 'Tis a long, weary while since they were home with God, as we were shortly. Mayhap their eyes have grown too dim to see splendours that we hail familiarly. As for me, I believe in God, and Love, and Heaven—and—and thee!"

From beneath the tribune came a sound, low but distinct—two raps upon the floor.

Mary started in terror, her heart beating furiously; but Frederick held her strongly to him.

"It is my squire, on watch below," he whispered; "he gives us warning. Have no fear."

"They seek me—I must go," she said. "If we are found here—much may go ill."

"Where shall I see thee tomorrow?"

"I cannot say—they may whisk me to Ghent—or elsewhere. I never know! Where Duchess Margaret is, there I shall be. And I will find a way to see thee."

Mary could distinguish the voice of her chief lady-in-waiting, trembling with anxiousness; and there were the deeper, rumbling tones of men.

"Crouch low," Frederick whispered. "They will not come up here, I think."

Thrilling with joy in obeying him, she stretched herself on the tribune floor. He likewise laid him at full length, and side by side they waited, while lantern rays, directed here and there, pierced momently the darkness.

Nothing rewarded the seekers save a grizzled stranger devoutly on his knees before the guttering candles of a shrine. He gave no heed to them, but continued his earnest supplication.

When the church was quiet again, Mary was not wholly glad. It had been so passing sweet to share danger with him, to feel his chivalric protection, to be—even for a brief, breathless moment—one with him against all the world that was forever pressing upon the young Duchess of Burgundy.

But she knew her absence was noted, and that it was cause of alarm.

She must return at once and reassure them. Cloaked and hooded as she was, she could slip back through the garden and, if observed, be easily mistaken for a maid-servant on a secret tryst.

Frederick went with her to the door. The garden was quiet and seemed deserted. But the

house was much astir; every window was alight, and Mary showed Frederick which of them were in her room.

"Some news of a disturbing sort has come," she said. "I will try to write and tell thee what it is, if thou hast patience to wait till I find out."

"I shall be here, dear heart, watching those windows that are thine, until I know thou'rt safe returned. And never fear but that I will find thee out, where e'er they take thee. God keep thee, Love, and give thee to none but me."

He strained her to his breast, ardently, and kissed her with pure rapture; then, kneeling, pressed his lips reverently upon her hand.

When she was gone he still had that feeling of her nearness which lovers know—ofttimes when seas divide them.

Nor was he certain if the time were long or short before she came to her window and, bending therefrom with all the yearning tenderness imaginable, dropped downward into those deep shadows wherein he was hid, a note:

"*We return to Ghent tomorrow.*"

When this was done, she sank on her knees, exhausted with fear for what she meant to do.

CHAPTER VII

"RULERS HAVE NO FRIENDS"

"YOUR highness," said Louis de Gruuthuuse, bending low, "will pardon me my plain speaking; but such things cannot be. Your realm demands your safe-keeping——"

The traces of his recent agitation were still visible in his countenance, evident in his manner.

Duchess Margaret was as pale as death; and Mevrouw Anna de Gruuthuuse as florid, with like fear, as one of the red cabbages she so greatly relished.

Her grace of Burgundy, brought to bay by them, was like a child captured at arrant mischief. And her defiance was curiously, deliciously, compound of childishness and of imperious resentment.

"I would," she cried stormily, "that my father, the late duke, were here to see his heiress and successor. Have I not even such discretion, think

ye, as might serve to keep me from witless wandering? Or is it honour that ye think I lack? May I not even pray without permission? Because I am young and do not wield a sword nor lead an army nor clap chancellors in dungeons when my mood is that sort, nor order heads chopped off, lands confiscate, does everyone mistake me for a child, a creature of no dignity and no decision?"

With such swift-rushing torrent of words as is possible only in French, and with such vehemence of manner as only the most truly Gallic woman can command, Mary poured forth her grievance.

Stolid Mevrouw Anna could only gape; Duchess Margaret's manner, though stately in the extreme, could not quite conceal the Englishwoman's wonder at the Frenchwoman's frank and impetuous speech.

But Louis, although he was a Fleming through and through, was more than a little used to Gallic princes, and this was a mimic, child's-play storm to him compared with many he had weathered with Duke Charles and with his father before him. It was not for his courtliness that he had found favour in three reigns, but for his shrewd counsel and his power with the communes. Nevertheless,

he knew as well as any man how to humour royalty.

He bent, now, and knelt on one knee—a posture not easy for him to maintain with comfort or, he suspected, with dignity.

"Duchess," he said, humbly, "your displeasure is my deep chagrin. For any remission of the reverence and the obedience due always to your sovereign grace, I make abasement of myself before you. But I entreat your highness to recall what my anxiety has been on your account, since your puissant and illustrious father fell, fighting for Burgundy. Fearing the Gantois, whose violence has never been restrained by reverence for any count, or duke, or king, I brought you hither secretly, to my house.

"Full well, lady, my mistress, do I realize the many vexations of your state; they would have tried the mettle of your sire, and for a maiden, tender and inexperienced, are a burden that should wake pity in the breast of any man. In all I do, I seek not to add to them, but to help your grace establish yourself well in your vast domains and enjoy security——"

"So I am told by everyone!" Mary cried. "And by each one told differently. If I could

know where in my realm, from Zuyder Zee to Dauphiny, I could find one whose counsel was inspired by love for me and not by self-interest, I would hearken to it gladly. But when, even with my eyes, scarce-opened like a nine-days' cat's to light of day, I can see each pleader's own advantage in his plea, is it a thing to wonder at if none of them move me greatly?"

Some chord paternal in the breast of Gruuthuuse answered to this outburst. How young she was! Not alone in years, but in thought and feeling. How was it possible for a girl to grow up to womanhood, to her twentieth year, in a court like that of Burgundy, and not have drunk in with the very air she breathed, such knowledge as that rulers have no friends? Since time began was ever such a sorry jest as this child-heart set in the midst of plots and counterplots so thick and so diabolical that the most hardened courtiers of Europe were unequal to them? A pang of pity for her grace smote Louis, for an instant. Then he recovered from it.

"A courier has come this night from Ghent," he said, "bringing news that your royal godfather, in his eagerness to 'safeguard' your realm, has

bribed your grace's Governor, the Lord Crèvecœur, and taken Arras which, as your highness knows, he hath besieged these weeks past. Ghent seethes with fury, which is not assuaged by your absence. Your grace is well aware how dear to Flanders is the fair province of Artois. For centuries the warcry of the Flemings has been 'Arras! Arras!' With that cry our countrymen have rallied in a hundred desperate battles. Now, it is said, the French conqueror purposes to change the name of Arras and re-people it with settlers who hate Flanders. And while such things are happening in your realm, your grace may have to listen to much counsel less gentle than what I offer," he finished, grimly.

Mary turned lily-pale, and her small hands, clasped, fluttered against her bosom where she held them as if to still the tumult within it.

As if but a wall's thickness divided them from her, she seemed to hear the tumultuous Gantois howling, in their thick, guttural speech, for the blood of any and all whom they, in their insane fury, might suspect as the Crèvecœur of Ghent or his abettors. She seemed to see their rage-distorted faces, and among them, thousandfold

more menacing than all the rest, the hawk face of Guelders. They came close to her, and closer, those threatening, up-turned visages—a lashing, surging sea of them, angry, resistless, merciless, breaking around her feet as she stood trembling on her piteous elevation. (So often in her short span of years, she had stood on some balcony and gazed wondering down upon the populace, more awed by them than they by Burgundy's heiress, that it was no wonder she thought most readily of her subjects thus: a sea of up-turned faces.) Suddenly the sea was there no more. Only one face remained, and it was by her side, was coming nearer, and all her flesh was shrinking with horror. Guelders! Her great, brown eyes were black with terror, their pupils dilated by that which her mind's eye had seen. With a gesture of appeal she flung her arms toward the still spaces where the threatening mob had, in her fancy, been—imploring the return of any menace, rather than this quiet of death with Guelders beside her.

Lord Gruuthuuse, angered and anxious as he was, marvelled at the horror with which she received his news; and thought he saw in it promise of new docility.

If he could have guessed what plan Mary's young head was hatching for her young heart's aid, he would have been the most astounded courtier in Christendom.

CHAPTER VIII

"A CASTLE GRIM"

CARRIAGES were still so few in Europe as to be used principally for shows of state rather than for convenience. Duchess Mary owned more than one—including that magnificent conveyance in which her late father had taken away the breath of his liege, the frugal Emperor Frederick, in their meeting at Trèves, three and a half years ago; but the sight of a carriage on the road from Bruges to Ghent would have proclaimed a ducal cortège—which was precisely what Louis de Gruuthuuse wished to avoid.

The cavalcade, therefore, that cantered soberly out through the Porte de Ghent, next morning, was one which might traverse the thirty miles to its destination without exciting suspicion that her grace of Burgundy was in progress.

The young duchess and her stepmother rode

side by side; Margaret of York sitting her saddle gracefully but without that air of much-accustomedness which characterized Mary's horsemanship. Duchess Mary was almost as much at home on horseback as her father had been; she passionately loved riding, and the rhythmic movement of a good mount's muscles was one of the keenest delights she knew.

Even with all that lay heavy on her heart and mind, that morning, she could not resist the challenge to high spirits that always came to her with sunshine, and invigorating air, and a horse of good gait, and an open road.

. Margaret, who was exceeding grave, marvelled inwardly at the girl's irrepressible gaiety.

With them rode Jeanne de la Clite, Madame de Halewyn, first lady of the bedchamber to Duchess Mary, and one of Margaret's English ladies. Freda and a serving-maid of Margaret's were the only other women in the party, which was further composed of Gruuthuuse, his chaplain-secretary, and an armed escort as small as Gruuthuuse dared to make it. His difficult undertaking it was to smuggle the duchesses into the palace at Ghent before the excited Gantois knew of their arrival.

Duchess Mary was well aware of this, yet her spirits seemed to Louis almost blithe; and this, to him, was cause for wonder. For well he knew that Mary had been with her father in Ghent, ten years ago, when Charles was forced to swallow many insults from the disloyal and disrespectful Gantois, in order to make his safe escape with his daughter and his valuables. Mary, Lord Gruuthuuse thought, must have many memories of the tumultuous scenes preceding their inglorious flight from the city whose pledge of loyalty the new duke had come to receive. But if she was troubled by such recollections, she gave no sign thereof, not even when Louis told her his apprehension.

Partly this was because Charles the Bold's daughter had a large measure of his intrepidity; and partly it was because her usual fearlessness of physical danger was augmented by the new madness in her blood. What she had hope to gain was so great that she could not make herself think fearfully of the risk, the cost.

She was a sweet young thing to look upon, that April morning in the pale gold sunlight as she sat with the ease of a born horsewoman on her roan hackney. Her long cloak did indeed conceal

from the eye those tender, gracious lines of her figure which every poet in Europe had extolled; but the grace of her riding suggested to the mind what happiness must thrill her body because of its beautiful adequacy. Her face was flushed with a delicate pink which owed something to the soft breeze blowing from the south, and something to her recollection of a primrose which had been plucked from her bosom's warmth to lie forever against the heart of a noble lover. And in her great brown eyes there shone that light which only love can kindle.

More times than one, Louis de Gruuthuuse looked at her, remembering the horror he had seen in her face last night, and marvelled. A master, he pondered, one might by diligence come eventually to know. But the mind of a maid is past understanding.

It was deep dusk when they approached Ghent. All city walls in those days frowned—it was their principal business, except at such times as they had to make actual resistance to persons who do not allow a frown to intimidate them. But to Margaret of York, at least, among the little cavalcade approaching them in the steely light that suc-

ceeds to afterglow, the walls of Ghent looked sinister; and she shuddered as the Porte de Bruges closed ponderously behind them.

All day, Louis had been revolving in his anxious mind plans for safeguarding Mary. For seventy years past the grim old ninth-century stronghold known as the Château of the Counts of Flanders, had been the seat of the Council of Flanders; while the Burgundian dukes had held their dazzling courts in a new palace hard by the Bruges gate and the Grand Béguinage of Ste. Elizabeth. The palace was built for magnificence and not to withstand onslaughts. Louis was fearful of what might happen if the duchess returned thither and the populace assaulted the place. His own residence in Ghent was even less secure. He thought of taking her to the Grand Béguinage and asking for her the protection of the Mother Superior. And he thought of taking her to the château and putting her in the care of the Council of Flanders. The latter was the more daring, but the astute Louis decided that it was also the better diplomacy. It would ill-become Burgundy's duchess to seek, in her capital city, the shelter of a nunnery; and, contrariwise, the deputies from all Flanders would

probably take thought for other interests than just those of Ghent, and protect Mary against the uprising of the Gantois.

Accordingly, the little party travelled as quickly as possible through the rue de Bruges, leading to the château; and before twoscore citizens knew that Gruuthuuse was returned from Bruges, bringing the duchesses, the travellers had passed the gate-house and were in the great castle yard enclosed by massive walls and semicircular defence-towers.

In deference to the spirit of the age, and particularly to the spirit of such cities as Ghent, the castle of the rulers made the smallest possible showing of feudal strength. The city was the object of defence, now, and not the personal possessions of an overlord; scores of thousands of arrogant weavers and brewers and butchers and bakers demanded protection for themselves and their homes, their industries, their communal life; the city walls were to one and all what once the castle walls had been to the few. And the development of heavier siege guns was rapidly altering the nature of warfare and defence in Europe.

The Château of the Counts, in Mary's day, was trying as hard as it could to seem obsolete—a relic of times bygone. Yet it still had a degree of impregnability not matched by many strongholds in Europe; and its deep dungeons were destined to serve as many black purposes, for years to come, as those of Loches or of the Bastille, or of London Tower.

The drawbridge was seldom raised now; the portcullis seldom lowered; no warders paced, each his unvarying beat, from tower to tower on the crenellated ramparts. The party of Lord Gruuthuuse readily passed by the keeper of the outer gate, drew rein in the castle yard, and waited for the Governor to answer the summons of her grace of Burgundy.

There was nothing in his manner, when he came, to suggest the gaoler. There was nothing in the manner of Louis to suggest that he was handing over Duchess Mary to be dealt with by her subjects as they willed.

Nevertheless, Margaret's heart was heavy as lead. Recollections of things told by scare-babe nurses, and others, in her childhood, about "bloody Pontefract," rose in her mind—and were joined by

fresher horrors of which she had heard since leaving England: her own brother's blood-guilt for the midnight dispatch of Henry the Sixth, in Wakefield Tower. She trembled so violently she could scarcely command her voice to acknowledge the salutations of the Governor. But Mary, if she felt a quiver of dismay, of apprehension, gave not a sign thereof.

"Her grace," Louis said, speaking for her only in such manner as a courtier would for his young sovereign, "will hold council here, tomorrow, with her deputies. And that she may be free, tonight, of importunities and the palaver of her palace, wills to bide here, in the old chamber of the countesses of Flanders."

"The château is honoured," the Governor replied, making to his duchess and then to the widow of Duke Charles, much obeisance.

With such ceremony as his household allowed—he was in effect little more than a custodian—he conducted his royal guests to the apartments formerly occupied by the counts. These were in a building known as the palace, adjoining the great donjon; and the last Duke of Burgundy who had used them as his residence was John the Fearless

when he fled hither from Paris after murdering his cousin of Orleans.

The château was washed on more than half of its circumference by the river Lys; and the residence rose high above the crenellations of the defence towers, on the river side.

The first room into which the royal party was ushered, was the reception hall, an apartment scantily lighted from two narrow, fortress-like windows. Heavy pillars of stone, supporting the groined vaulting, made the room seem more like a crypt than like a domicile. In the cavernous brick fireplace, beneath a hooded mantle of stone, a small fire was burning.

Supper, the Governor said, would be laid here for their highnesses, as soon as it could be prepared. Meanwhile, he craved leave to see that the chambers above were made ready.

Mary sat on a small chair near the fire and spread her hands to the warmth which was more grateful on account of the cold within doors than on account of the cold without. Freda unfastened Mary's heavy cloak and let it fall back upon the chair.

"I have not been in these rooms," Mary said,

"since I was a child. I got such a scare here, once, that I could never forget it. In there," nodding toward an arched doorway leading to a guard-room, "there was a trap-door to a dungeon—an *oubliette.*" She shuddered. "I saw the trap opened, once, and peered down. A man-at-arms was holding a flaming torch. Who should have had charge of me, or why I came there, I cannot remember. But I can never forget how dark it was, nor how noisesomely it smelled; nor how, when my eyes grew accustomed to the blackness, and the flare of the torch, I could see a white face at the bottom of that well. Then I heard chains rattle feebly, and faint moans——"

"Mary!" her stepmother cried, entreaty mingled with exasperation in her tone.

But Mary was not to be stayed. Nor could Margaret decide in her own mind whether the girl was so lacking in real fear she was enjoying, like a playful child, the terrors of imagination; or whether she was in such a state of nervous apprehension that she had no control of her demeanour.

Margaret was well-bred in royalty and in English composure. Her trepidation was splendidly concealed, even from the little group of intimate

attendants and from Gruuthuuse. She could not understand Mary's apparently light mood.

When the Governor of the castle returned, Gruuthuuse begged leave to retire to his own dwelling in Ghent, unless his attendance was further desired.

Then Mary donned her dignity and dismissed him royally.

"Our thanks, Lord Gruuthuuse, for your safe conduct of us. And to any of our fond subjects you see before we do, greeting. Tell them their duchess is happy to be with them again."

Somehow, Gruuthuuse was not reassured by this. He withdrew, wondering greatly, and—still wondering—passed an unrestful night.

After a supper which Mary tried in vain to enliven with gay talk, the royal ladies ascended to their sleeping apartments.

The narrow, stone stairway to those led up directly from the reception hall. The bedroom of the counts, immediately above the hall, was ready as it could be made on so short notice, for Burgundy's duchess. A most spacious chamber it was, well lighted and well aired from three large double windows, and heated by the blaze from a small fire

of logs in the shallow fireplace beneath a hooded chimneypiece. The ceiling beams and timbers were very heavy—for they supported a roof which was not merely a covering, but a defence elevation —but otherwise than that, and the deep embrasure in the thick walls at each window, there was not much to suggest the stronghold rather than the palace. The Arras tapestries on the walls were very fine. The tiled floor was spread with good carpets of the Orient. There was a massive and ornate bed, with a *prie-dieu* beside it, and a great chest, gorgeously carved, which some Count of Flanders had brought from Italy—perhaps on his return from a Crusade. The small stand for bowl and ewer, with its delicate equipment, looked Italian, also; as did the chairs, the cushioned stool beside the low reading-table, and the writing-desk.

The bedroom of the countesses adjoined, and for this night was Duchess Margaret's, who quaked with dread to be left alone therein, but not for anything would have her lady-in-waiting and her maid-servant guess this. Nor did she mean, at first, to let Mary suspect her fears.

But when hour after still, dragging hour went by, and Margaret lay staring into the pregnant dark,

she rose, stealthily, at last, and took her night light from behind its shield.

Shivering with chill and with fear, she wrapped about her her thick dressing-gown of rich wool brocade, fur-trimmed, and thrust her bare feet into her slippers that matched the gown. Then, shielding her candle from the draughts, she stepped through the open door to Mary's room.

The bed was empty. Beside it, behind a screen, Mary's own night-light burned. The embers on the hearth still glowed warmly and illumined the room's shadows—empty, also.

A thousand horrors sprang all at once in Margaret's brain; her vague, formless dread took on a thousand shapes, all hideous.

Why had they trusted Gruuthuuse? Why, God in Heaven, had they no one in whom they could put faith?

CHAPTER IX

ON THE BATTLEMENT

FREDA, who misliked the château as a lodging, begged that she be allowed to sleep in the room of her mistress. But Mary would not listen to this plea.

"I have much to think over," she told Lady Halewyn and the maid, "touching the most important conference I must hold tomorrow. Burgundy's future lieth here" —— holding out her small, soft hand; and not the right hand which does deeds, but the left, the hand of destiny, the hand on which so many princes clamoured to place a ring, the hand which by its subjection and not by its power could change the map of Europe, in the simple acceptance of a plain gold band—"and I must think well ere I make pledge of it. Of counsel I have had more than enough to muddle me. No one can help me do what must be done.

As best I can, God guiding me, I my own self must settle this great thing. Leave me alone, and pray God to show me the way."

So, when they had done all they could to make her comfortable, the Lady Halewyn and Freda withdrew—the serving-woman full of fears for her grace of Burgundy's safety of person, and the first lady of the bedchamber heavy-hearted for the peace of Mary's heart and mind.

Jeanne de Halewyn was one of those rare women who perceive the large significance of some things near at hand. She had the instinct for the dramatic, which almost every woman has; but she was alert to the elements of drama in many occurrences which did not similarly move other women, because other women did not feel, as she did, the intricate relation of this episode with that. Deeply versed in the politics of her day, she had also no scant share of that feeling for history-in-the-making which so signally characterized her cousin, Philippe de Commines.

Thronging her mind, that night, as she performed her simple duties for Mary of Burgundy, were thoughts which thrilled her and chilled her as if some master-romancer among the great poets

were painting a scene such as the Italian, Messer Dante, set forth of Francesca da Rimini. The young duchess, "*gente et mignonne*" in her white night-dress of fine Courtrai linen, smocked at throat and wrists, was so innocent and so touching a figure in that vast room where many blood-and-iron ancestors of hers had slept while the dungeons below smothered the groans of their victims, that Jeanne de Halewyn could scarce keep her tears back as Freda unbound the abundant light-brown hair and let it fall, veil-like, about Mary's virginal young body. That little white creature, fashioned for all the tendernesses and wistful for them, too—Jeanne knew—must sit here in this great, grim room, alone, and in her own soul fight a battle involving more for Burgundy and for all Europe, than any her soldier-father had ever fought.

When she was alone, Mary stripped the crimson cushions from several chairs and threw them into one of the deep window embrasures; then, wrapping about her her velvet dressing-gown, she crept into the nest of cushions and sat, her knees updrawn and clasped by her hands, gazing out into the star-splendid night.

Across the river Lys she could see plainly the chimneys and roof-lines of her palace. Below, if she craned to look, her view commanded a section of the battlements.

The city was very still; not a sound from its humming-hive reached to her any more than if she had been on one of the far stars. The isolation of her height, which might at any other time have made her self-pitiful, was bliss to her tonight because she had the lover's sense of company: the more alone others left her, the more she could realize his presence in the spirit.

That he was somewhere down there, inside the walls of Ghent tonight, she did not doubt. Nor had she even momentary misgiving that he would find her. She knew him, with her heart's wisdom, for the kind of lover nothing stays nor changes. And the pride of this knowledge she wore regally as she could have worn no other crown. Two nights ago she had felt herself a puny thing, the sport of Fortune. Now, not only was all the world different, but in a mystic way most wonderful she seemed linked for the first time to eternity. Time was too brief by far to hold the bounds of love, and this earth's space too narrow. Up,

somewhere in those vast reaches that the constellations traversed, there must be the great Elysium where lovers dwell endlessly, an elect company even among the immortals.

So long was her gaze upward turned among the friendly stars, it was not until a small boat had several times passed and repassed before her window that she recognized a tall figure standing alert in it and scanning the castle's river front. He was there!

Seizing a lamp, Mary held it so he could see her face. He waved to her that he would come to the battlements beneath her window.

How he could come there, Mary never thought. She knew he would come. He sat down, gave a low-voiced order, and the boat glided away.

It was a long while to spend breathless, ere he came again. Then he motioned to Mary that he would throw something, and in a moment it came: a soft ball of yarn with some weight at its centre so it could take direction. The weight was a small stone with a note wrapped around it:

"Dear Heart: When thou hast this, I shall come close beneath. The end of yarn I hold is fast to a rope's end. Pull and make fast the rope—thank

God, I was bred in that Tirol where men climb like mountain goats! Then, if thou canst, come on the battlement."

Mary had need of all her wits, and all her strength, too, to make the rope secure. He did not remind her how much depended on its safety—he knew she needed no reminder.

At length, tugging at his end mightily, he began to climb. In an agony of apprehension, old Franz watched him, marvelling at the hot blood of youth. For Franz was sleepy, and yearned for his bed.

When Mary saw Frederick's head appear above the parapet, she concluded her beseeching prayer to God with a quick thanksgiving; then, muffling herself in her fur-lined travelling cloak, she stole down the narrow stone stairway and at its foot stopped to listen. Her heart beat, as it seemed to her, noisily. But she could hear the heavy breathing of Freda who had improvised a couch and was, as she thought, on guard in the reception hall.

Smiling at Freda's evident intent, and at her weary inadequacy, also at what good Freda's surprise would be could she know the penalty of her

sound sleeping, Mary crept past her with a cat's stealth, and down the flight of steps leading to the entrance of the palace.

What bolts or chains she might encounter there, she could not guess; nor if a sentinel were at that door. She only knew she meant to go therethrough.

Little dreaming what he was favouring, Lord Gruuthuuse on departing had given the Governor orders to make no show of guarding her highness, lest it seem to her that she was being held. No man could be more anxious than Louis was to avoid giving offence to the ruler of Burgundy and the lady who must soon be also either Dauphiness of France or Queen of the Netherlands or Empress-elect of Germany.

His prestige with the Flemish court when he could say to them that their sovereign was in the château awaiting her council's pleasure, was complete. And with his duchess it was unimpaired—or so he fancied.

So Mary found easy egress into the castle yard, and soon was on the battlements, hurrying with winged feet to her Love.

His arms were outstretched for her, and he

folded her to his breast with a gladness transcending words.

For moments that might have been many or might have been few, so far was Mary from caring to reckon them, she felt not the slightest impulse to speak; the perfect, pure ecstasy of his presence filled her soul brimming full.

The slight breeze blowing was not chill; it seemed laden with the breath of fair, spicy climes where summer blooms early. Overhead, it was a celestial gala night—the sky was wearing all her jewels, and every one of them seemed especial bright. There was just enough current in the soft-flowing Lys to make a musical murmur of lapping water against the foundations of the walls and bastions. And the sweet stillness was as if the world hushed so these lovers might hear each the other's heart beating.

Back of them, rising high against the spangled heavens, was the palace, or residence; before them, silhouetted in sharp, martial outlines, the crenellations of the battlements. From these vantage-points for archers, how many thousands of arrows had been sped from twanging bows in days gone by! Through the machicolations of these

towers what showers of stones, of boiling oil, had poured upon any and all who essayed to scale them as Frederick had done tonight!

"Dear Heart!" he whispered, when he felt that he should speak, "how came you here, to this grim place—and why?"

"My Lord Gruuthuuse," she answered, "said there was much turbulence in Ghent, because of Arras falling to the French. And so, he brought the duchesses here for—for safety."

"Both of them?"

"Yes."

"And were both, then, in Bruges?"

"Both—but none knew, save Gruuthuuse's household. He took them there secretly, because here they were so sore pressed. His power is great; he is much trusted hereabouts. Didst hear, in the city tonight, mutterings or threats, or see signs of violence?"

"More than I liked—since this place has you in it. I never saw men I misliked more warmly than these Gantois. Their insolence passes belief. Their talk is all of Guelders and against the Fox of France. They speak of the young duchess as if she was their pawn and not their sovereign. I

tell you, Sweet, I would I had you on some Fortunate Isle where only Love is king—where you and I might be as the good God designed, each half of each, and life made of honest work and honest love. My soul is sick of plots and politics, ignoble barter, and shrewd perfidy. If you will come with me, this night, I will go and hide myself and you from all I ever knew erstwhile. I have no money and no trade. But somewhere in the wide world, dear, there must be bread—and honey—that I can earn to feed you with. Wilt come?"

Mary clung to him yearningly.

"The bread alone—*sans* honey—were enough for me," she said, "if we could eat always of the same loaf. But I—I owe a debt here, my love—and I must pay it ere I please myself and thee. Grave times are come on Burgundy. In that household where I have been so gently raised, a girl—no older than I am, nor yet more big—is crushed beneath the cares of sovereignty. All the world presses her—each for his own advantage. She is distraught. I cannot help her—cannot help myself! Yet I must stay, here where her so-desperate battle is, until something is settled. I could not run away. There are so few on whom

they can in anywise depend—those two, girls like myself, in this great court of scheming, spying, ruthless men!"

"God love thy staunchness!" Frederick prayed, fervently. "With all my heart's desire of thee, I would not thou wert otherwise. Thus have I hoped my Love would be—above all things steadfast. For all the world, it seems to me, has gone mad for gain. No one thinks save for his advantage. Those splendid days when men gave all they had in furthering great causes, and women loved best those who were most consecrate, are gone; and thou and I are come in sorry times. But we will make them brighter with our love!"

He found a sheltered angle of the ramparts, where they could sit down, beneath the thick-starred canopy of the sky. And, holding her close against his heart whereon the primrose lay, he talked of what he meant to do.

"I will go home," he said, "and tell my father what life holds for me. And if he will not listen—! Dear, I will come in any case. Wait for me. Never doubt that I shall fetch thee."

"And I," she promised, "will leave naught untried that I may be ready for thee. Doth,

peradventure, your homeward way lead you past Nancy? Some one is buried there in St. George's church, said to be Monseigneur of Burgundy. His daughter cannot believe that he is there. If your ear catches any rumour, howe'er faint, that René of Lorraine has Charles in hiding for Louis of France, will you send word of it, somehow, to me for Duchess Mary? She fights for time, and prays for his release. If only Burgundy had his puissance in this hour of bitter need!"

"I will gladly serve your duchess for your sake, Sweetheart," Frederick replied. "I trust she gives God gratitude for such true love as yours. My notion of her, formed on hearsay, was far different from that you have given me. And I had interest something especial in her, since 'twas said a few years since, her father had betrothed her to our Emperor's son, the Archduke Maximilian."

"Her father, our late lord," Mary said, "offered her at one time or another to almost every man in Europe who had that to barter which our duke desired. And yet, I think he felt no haste to marry her to any. Hast ever seen the archduke?"

"Yes; I was in Trèves when emperor and

archduke met Charles the Bold. Crowds flocked from far to see the splendid sights—and I with them. No such magnificence was ever beheld elsewhere; the very troopers of Burgundy's duke wore cloth of gold mantles over their armour of shining steel."

"I know," she murmured; "I have heard. What like was the archduke? Report made him out a backward and uncouth boy."

"He seemed a fair-looking youth, playing his part obediently, in gay trappings of crimson and silver," Frederick replied. "But I am told his stomach for such business is not strong."

"Think you he and our duchess would do well to wed?"

"No!" he cried vehemently. "I think that already each has too much land, too little opportunity to do those things that bring pure happiness. What interest could he have in coming here among these turbulent people of hers, to fight for mastery over them? His heart is elsewhere—it must needs be so. And how can she have heart for his empire and its rule, who has not heart enough for her own? Neither of them is equal now, to what there is to do. And if they wed,

whose land shall they neglect—his, or hers? Or shall they neglect each other?

"She should bestow her hand on some true knight who, loving her and her only, would glory to fight for her against all the earth. And the archduke should have to wife the lady of his heart, to take his people for her own, his home for hers, and bless them in his ruling, through her love."

Mary sighed. "If those are also his sentiments," she said, "I trust that he is not so encompassed and sore pressed as is her grace of Burgundy."

A low cry, almost but not altogether suppressed, coming from overhead, startled them. Mary recognized her step-mother's voice.

"I must make haste—ere she gives the alarm. God keep thee, Love—keep thee for me alone. I shall tell Duchess Margaret of thee tonight; and if thou hast word to send me, send it in her care."

"And I," he whispered, "can be reached, always, by letter sent to the Bald Eagle Inn, Innsbruck, Tirol, in care of Squire Franz Hofer. While I bide here, I am at the Abbey of St. Bavon."

She kissed him; not shyly, as a maid kisses her lover, but clingingly as a woman parting from her beloved mate.

Then, grasping the rope, he disappeared below the parapet.

She durst not bide to watch his descent; and a few moments later she was in the chamber of the counts again, confronting Margaret who had seen the rope and looked for explanation before making outcry.

"Mary!" she cried, "what does this mean?"

Burgundy's young duchess showed herself regal then.

"It can mean but one thing," she answered proudly.

Margaret knew that. No escapade, either prankish or passionate, would Mary have permitted herself.

When day dawned, the murmuring of confidences between the two girls was not yet hushed.

Nor had those confidences been disturbed by sounds of distress from below the battlements.

[redacted]

CHAPTER X

"OUR LADY OF BURGUNDY!"

THE great apartment where the Council or Estates of Flanders met, occupied a whole floor of the donjon, and was lighted from four sides by round-arched windows cut in the thick walls. The ceiling of heavy timber supported the defence platform on the roof, from which a narrow stone stair led down directly into the great hall. There was a vast fireplace of brick and stone, without ornamentation. Nothing savoured of other comforts than security and an ill-distributed warmth; yet this had been for generations a dwelling place for the Counts of Flanders, whose knights and esquires slept in the cavernous banqueting hall below.

What those counts would have thought of the use to which their residence was now put, it were idle to conjecture. They could not have thought

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about it. Priests, nobles, and commons assembling to tell the ruler of Flanders their will, not for themselves alone but for the ruler's self also? Unthinkable!

Nevertheless, here they came: abbots and priors, bishops and archbishops; counts and nobles of other degrees; and burghers whose fat purses made them insolent. And when they were all assembled, there was a stirring fanfare of silver trumpets, the Estates of Flanders rose, and a tide of magnificence flowed into the grim, great hall. Cloth of gold and cramoisy; velvets of Venice and Genoa; marvels of goldsmiths' craft from the *botegas* of the Ponte Vecchio; glinting Toledo spears and burnished armour; waving plumes and flaming banners; the glittering, colourful pageant poured through the low doorway and filled the vast grey place with splendour.

There was a hush when the young duchess came, preceded by the heralds-at-arms of all the various states which hailed her as their sovereign, and accompanied by the duchess dowager and by the Chancellor Hugonet in his robes of state.

Margaret was very pale. Her heavy train of white Genoese velvet and ermine was borne by

four noble demoiselles of high estate; and on her head, from which a long, white veil depended, was the superb crown of the consort of Burgundy. She was like a lily in the midst of all the rainbow hues, for the heralds were ablaze with colour, and Hugonet looked the epitome of all that had made Burgundy a synonym for overwhelming magnificence.

Mary was dazzling. Accustomed to ducal splendours as they were, the Flemings gaped at her wonderingly. No man among them could have told his wife, that night, what her highness wore. Only a few of them, most skilled in courtcraft, guessed why she made so great showing of her state that day before the three estates of Flanders. But Adolph of Guelders was one of those who thought he knew.

Duke Adolph's grey prison-pallor and his poor, sad-coloured clothes (to which he clung purposefully) made him a strange contrast to the resplendent young sovereign on the dais. On her fair head rested the crown her father had worn. Her mantle blazed with jewels. Her throat and bosom bore gems of fabulous value. Adolph gazed at it all unblinkingly—even at the herald in the armor-

ial coat of Guelderland, which duchy now hailed Mary as its sovereign. This show of sovereignty amused him, tickled his sardonic humour. Emptier panoply there could not be; and none knew it better than he. Let her parade it! Let her play, like the child she was, with these baubles of an evanished state, while Louis's army ravaged her territory, occupied her cities, and marched upon her very capital. Adolph's hawk eyes watched the pageant mockingly, and as mockingly overlooked the men of Flanders who surrounded him. Not one among them—rich, florid, over-fed, pompous, braggart, and cowardly lot!—knew how to get the thing they all so ardently desired.

For generations the fat purses of these Flemings had been disgorging into the exchequer of Burgundy's dukes the earnings of their commerce with all the world; hating, lowering, muttering, imprecating, but paying, ever paying, and then paying again. Yet not one among them was soldier and statesman enough to found the Netherlands kingdom that was their desire. They must open the doors of a dungeon in the castle of Namur, and call forth a grey-visaged man who had there languished for six years.

Adolph despised them, even though they had given him his opportunity. And he despised the young duchess whom he must wed; her impotence disgusted him and enraged him. Her father he had hated with a vengefulness Namur's dungeon could not smother; but he thanked whatever gods he recognized, for such a hate; on it he had thrived for years of dark, chill, noisome captivity, during which he had not known what fortune followed the sword of his enemy.

Then, after a long black night of impotent hate, came to the door of that dungeon in Namur, certain Gantois who told him of Granson and Morat and Nancy; of the stark body frozen in the slime; of Louis XI. taking by the sword what he could not get through bribery. And they made him, the comrade of rats and lowlier vermin, this offer: "Come, we will wed our duchess with you; and you shall draw your sword for Netherlands."

When he saw Duchess Mary in Ghent, and felt her shrink from him with loathing and dread, it seemed to him that he was paid in full for all Burgundy had cost him. But he meant to be more than repaid.

With pretty show of sovereignty, the young

duchess convened this Council of her Estates of Flanders—as if they came there by her will and not she by theirs. Adolph smiled grimly. He had a hawk-like patience, and could gloat from afar while watching for the moment when he should swoop upon his prey.

Then Hugonet read for the Lady of Burgundy a gracious speech, thanking her Flemish councillors for their solicitude for her and for the realm, and giving them assurance how their loyalty upheld and comforted her in these sad days when foes threatened and the strong arm of the great warrior duke was stayed in its puissance.

"Full well," the Chancellor read on, "I know how young I am, and untried, for my great responsibilities. But your heads are wise, your hearts are strong and true. Of stretching our realm's boundaries we have had enough. With your counsel and help, my reign shall see no war made save to defend our rights. Our industry leads all the world. Our commerce with every nation is our pride. It is my hope to see these strengthened in a rule of peace. I ask your patience and your faith, while I make choice of one to share my vision as he shares my throne."

A low murmur ran through the assembly as the Chancellor ceased speaking. For a fraction of time almost infinitesimal but long enough for many hearts to seem as if they stopped beating, no man could tell just what that swelling sound meant. But the Lady of Burgundy, motioning Hugonet aside, rose in her place and, stepping a little forward, began to speak—to speak, not timidly, but with an eloquence as if God gave her words even as He had done to the maid of France. Her eyes looked, too, as the sires of these men who heard her had told them the holy Jeanne looked, not at any man but beyond all, as one seeing a vision.

"Estates of Flanders and Brabant," she said, her clear, fresh young voice thrilling with her earnestness, "a maid of fewer years than mine saved France. It was her task, given her to do. To me is given, by God's will, Burgundy. Maid though I am, and young, and small, inept in war and government, I must defend and rule mine own. The dreams imperial of my illustrious father are not for me to realize. But you, I think, will not be wroth with me on this account. Here, in these cities you have made so rich and great, your

prayer is not for further conquests by the sword, but for extension of your empire of trade. In peace and plenty, learning shall flourish, and all the arts. While other lands are being laid waste, ours shall be rich and illustrious, envied of all the world. Give me your trust and your good will."

She flung out toward them in appealing gesture her beautifully-modelled arms covered from shoulders to wrists as with long, unwrinkled gloves, in the cloth of silver of which her gown was made. Her mantle of ermine was lined with superb black velvet, and against this background her shining white dress was enhanced supremely. A shaft of sunlight piercing a high, narrow loophole of the donjon above her head, was broken into ten thousand refractions by the great diamonds which crowned her. She looked unearthly, irradiated by a glory celestial. More than one among the older councillors crossed himself piously, as in Our Lady's presence.

Then, in the hush which followed on their sovereign's appeal, John of Dadizeele rose in his place. No man in Flanders was more popular, and none more deserving of esteem. A good

fighter was John, when needs be, but a better friend of peace.

Drawing his sword, he held it high above his head.

"Our Lady of Burgundy!" he cried, in tones that rang clarion-like through the great, grim hall.

At that, a hundred blades flashed in the sun's shaft of light, and many more than a hundred voices hailed "Our Lady of Burgundy!"

The trumpets blared their elating music. Many men of many minds became suddenly as one under the power of a supreme emotion. Only one was untouched by it—a grey-visaged man in sad-coloured clothes. He smiled sardonically. He had the hawk's patience.

"Let us," urged Dadizeele when the tumult had sufficiently subsided for him to be heard, "send an embassy to the King of France at Arras. He must be made to know that we are in earnest and will brook no infraction of our treaties with him. His subterfuge that he but holds against insurrection those Burgundian provinces his arms invade, is founded in contempt of us. We know why he has seized them! And we know that when he understands our princess will not give

herself in marriage to the dauphin, he will try to rouse all French Burgundy. We must guard against this by diplomacy if we can—since we are so ill-prepared for self-defence."

"I name you, Dadizeele!" one deputy cried.

"Guelders! Guelders!" several voices shouted.

"Moldeghem!"

"Ligne!"

"Berssele!"

One by one they were named by acclamation—twelve in all: three from Brabant, four from Flanders, three from Artois, and two from Hainault.

Mary knew what it meant. These men were, practically without exception, partisans of the Netherlands cult; pledged to the overthrow of every French influence. Their interpretation of their recent outburst of fealty to her would almost certainly be that they were proving it when they urged her marriage with Guelders.

And among her councillors several heard, with hearts as heavy as her own, these nominations. Her highness had subjects whose interests this delegation would consider and serve not at all; and yet no men durst speak for them in this assembly.

Those salvos of acclaim were for the Countess of Flanders, the Duchess of Brabant, the Countess of Hainault—for the Lady of Netherlands, and not for the Lady of Burgundy.

CHAPTER XI

"FOR HER RIGHT TO LOVE"

VOLUMES of things the sort which are seldom expressed, though they are the most poignant among the emotions, were readable in the look wherewith Margaret that night regarded her step-daughter.

Gone, never to return, was the old attitude of nine years' developing: the immeasurable seniority not of age but of experience, the wife's condescension to the maiden, the consort's to the heir-apparent.

Something of that consciousness of sovereignty wherewith Mary had so stirred the Estates of Flanders, had entered also into the soul of Margaret of York—that, and more, too, made her gaze wondering. The mystic in her was prostrate before what she deemed the supernatural in Mary; and the woman in her was profoundly

moved by the revelation she had had of Mary's power to love. But there was another something in her that withstood these, conscientiously.

In Mary's small withdrawing-room at the palace, an intimate apartment made exquisite with treasures culled by her from among the vast gatherings of Burgundy's wealth, the two duchesses sat waiting certain of Mary's ministers. It was evening, and the heavy curtains of gold-coloured damask were drawn. Tall white tapers burned in many gold candlesticks, and the air was fragrant with the breath of starry white narcissus flowers in vases of Venetian glass. Green-gold satin, heavily embroidered in gold thread, hung on the walls. The polished oak floor was spread with a soft-toned carpet from India. Far different from the lodging of yesternight!

Mary had dismissed their attendants, even Jeanne Halewyn; and for the first moment since that day began, she and Margaret had opportunity for intimate speech.

"I marvel," Margaret said; "I was not able to believe it could be done: you have grown from child to woman, overnight."

Mary's smile was both proud and tender.

"Life may teach slowly," she replied; "and I have not lived long enough to learn many of its lessons. But Love has a magic method all his own —revealing great mysteries in one flash from Heaven. I was indeed a child three days ago, learning my lessons from a horn-book. Today I am sprung to womanhood, full-powered like Pallas from the brain of Zeus. I mean to fight —to fight for love as my great father fought for power. The splendour of my desire fills me with courage. What Heaven showed me when it opened in that revealing flash, is my eternal vision. I shall not falter—it will lead me on. I shall not tremble, because I shall not see the dangers 'round my feet. St. Michael, all in shining armour like a knight, led on the maid of France. My knight, too, shines—with the spirit of pure chivalry. Together, we will fill Burgundy with peace and all other fruits of love."

Impressed though she was by the manifestation of love in Mary, the duchess-dowager was still dubious about the propriety of what Mary purposed.

"I have heard," she said, "of kings and princes who wed as their choice was. But I never heard

of woman sovereign who stooped down to raise a man to her throne because she loved him."

"Then," Mary cried, joyously, "I shall write a fresh page in history!"

"From what you tell me," Margaret went on, continuing that caution she deemed her duty, "I think your knight savours of mystery. Young gentlemen of Tirol do not often roam the world, observing customs, looking at pictures, studying strange tongues. Dost feel that he is what he says? Men ill accounted for are more than like, in these days, to be someone's spy, prying for knowledge of our weaknesses."

"He hath found mine!" laughed Mary, happily. "Without even laying siege, he took all my defences in a glance or two; and, ere I knew, he had my citadel."

"But gave he no more history of himself than you have given me?"

"No more—though it was fuller than I gave him of me."

"Let me find him, and ask him more," Margaret pleaded.

"Nay, that I will not! I, also, am a Duchess of Brabant. And I will not see him vanish in a

boat drawn by enchanted swans, while I stay here to fight off Guelders! He has my faith, and I have his. My only anxiety is lest he learn my state before I have so won his love he will not be wary of me."

The awed look lingered still in Margaret's eyes. Nevertheless, she was sore troubled.

"It is a daring game you purpose playing," she murmured.

"I think," Mary answered, "women must have that in them, even as men have, which makes them glad to fight a great fight for their heart's desire. And, too, I am the daughter of that man whose dream it was to become Emperor of Gaul. He looked high and fought hard. I am his only child."

Margaret smiled ruefully.

"If he could hear you," she said, "methinks he would pronounce you bastard of Bourbon and not heir of Burgundy. You were the pawn he played with for that imperial crown. If he could have known——!"

"Yes," Mary cried, "if he could have known! In that full moment which, 'tis said, lies between time and eternity, what was his chief regret—

think you? My heart tells me it was not for empire. And when that moment comes to me, I want to feel that I have worn the crown I most did long to wear."

Margaret looked behind and about her, anxiously.

"You have thought well on what this will be called if it fails?" she asked in a low tone.

Mary nodded gravely, but would not speak the horrid word.

"It must not fail," she said resolutely.

"And—and they who—who go," Margaret pursued. "Are they to know what your hope is?"

"No! You only may know that at present. Look not so troubled, dear! I play for time, and for naught else momently. If, when those deputies come to him, his majesty believes they have my warrant, he will proceed at once against all Artois and Picardy. And I shall be rushed by these Netherlanders into marriage with Guelders. If he thinks I am but holding off against them to save myself for union with his infant son, he will treat them—I know him!—with that smooth speech which will flatter their vanity and make

them think that they have won him to their desires."

"Did love," Margaret murmured, "teach thee all this guile?"

Mary flushed, and cast down her glance.

"It is not guile," she protested. "But an' it were, I would scruple not to use it. I must have time! And if I cannot otherwise fight off these suitors of my lands and treasure chests, I will even, if need be, plight my troth to the puling babe of France—to hold myself virgin for the man I love."

"The Chancellor of Burgundy!" Princess Mary's chamberlain, announced. "And the Lord of Humbercourt."

Mary looked as if she resented being disturbed at this hour.

"On business?" she asked.

The chamberlain bowed apologetically.

"I believe they seek leave from court on private business," he explained. There was just so much trace of exultation in his manner as he thought warranted by the day's proceedings. Mary felt it, and hated it the more because it was so indefin-

able. In the back of this man's mind, there was a conviction that these two ministers of the Crown were departing from Ghent because they felt defeated and menaced; and he was glad; and the gladness shone through some chink in the mask of imperturbability which was his qualification for his office.

Mary had an instant intense relish of the reflection what his surprise would be if he knew the truth. Then she raised her right hand in a brief gesture of condescension, and said:

"Admit them."

A moment later they were ushered into her presence.

She regarded them tolerantly as they knelt before her—these distinguished-looking courtiers who had so long served Burgundy.

"Your highness," her chancellor began, "I crave permission to go to Ypres on private business." He was viscount of Ypres.

"It is granted," she said. "I pray you, rise, my lord."

"And I, if your highness has no need of me at present, will make a visit to my Picardy estates," Humbercourt prayed.

"There is," the princess answered, "no need that I am aware of to detain you."

She signed to him also to rise.

The chamberlain made a move as if he expected their immediate withdrawal; but the princess surprised him.

"Before you go, my lord chancellor," she said addressing Hugonet, "there is a matter of state that I require——"

She looked at the chamberlain; and in that look made one of her first bold plays in the kind of woman's statecraft wherewith she had to fight her battles. She meant the chamberlain to understand that she was about to remind those ministers of her agreement to appoint only Netherlanders to administrative offices; and that consideration for the age and dignity of these her father's counsellors moved her to tell them privately that their absence might be indefinitely prolonged.

How she managed to do this, she herself could not have told. She only knew that she had to do it! Any other way of dismissing the chamberlain would have aroused suspicion that might imperil her enterprise.

When she was alone with the duchess-dowager

and the two ministers, she talked quickly and not without some evidences of the strain she was under.

"That was, I think," she began, "well got through. I thank you for your caution. Better than I, you both know what care must attend this mission. More than my life—my honour—is in your hands. And what you risk in undertaking this, makes me unwilling to send you. If you go, it must be of your volition, and because your interests demand it as well as mine."

"Your wish is my command, madame," said Hugonet. "But also, the nature of the errand wins my heart doubly to it."

"Mine also, your highness," Humbercourt said.

"I thank you," Mary murmured. "Here is the letter, in which I say no more than that I shall be in all matters touching my realm's welfare, guided by you two who have so faithfully served Burgundy, and by the counsel of the duchess-dowager and that of my kinsman, Ravestain. You, my lords, will tell his majesty for me what policies of state have constrained me from immediate acceptance of the great honour he has offered

me in the dauphin's hand. You will see that he understands why there are no friends of France in the embassy appointed today with my apparent sanction. When do you ride?"

"We ride tonight, your highness," Humbercourt answered. "And by pressing forward urgently, should reach Arras full four-and-twenty hours before the others."

"God send you a safe journey," Mary prayed fervently.

"And a safe return," Margaret added, her voice tremulous with fear.

They knelt to kiss the hand of their sovereign and that of the duchess-dowager, and presently withdrew; Hugonet carrying in his breast that letter which was to play so tremendous a part in the history of Europe for generations to come—that letter in which a girl risked desperately for her right to love.

CHAPTER XII

ROYAL LADIES BECOME BOLD

THE superb Abbey of St. Bavon was noted throughout Europe for its princely hospitality and for the number of distinguished persons who had been guests there. John of Gaunt (or Ghent) had made, at this abbey, his entrance into that world which his descendants were destined to rule so widely and so long. And in the abbey church there had been celebrated that union of France's royal blood in Duke Philip the Bold of Burgundy, with the heiress of Flanders, which brought the Netherlands into "the splendid duchy."

The traditions of the abbey went back, in Mary's day, more than eight hundred years, and the actual history of many of the then-existing buildings embraced five centuries.

Always rich, always powerful, always in close association with the best scholarship of the age,

St. Bavon's Abbey preserved much that was worthiest of each generation it had known. In architecture it exemplified the perfections of Romanesque and all the stages of transition to late Gothic. In art, it possessed much that Byzantium had produced, and much that its own artists had wrought since the eleventh century. The library was superlatively rich in illumined manuscripts. And the church was repository of enough bones and other relics of saints and martyrs to make its shrines worth much in votive revenue.

The abbey, surrounded by a buttressed wall with defence towers at intervals, occupied ground, near the Porte d'Anvers, that was watered on two sides by the river Lys and on one side by the Scheldt. The gate to the abbey domain was toward the east, making this the first place of hospitality encountered by travellers from the Antwerp road. But wayfarers from Bruges might pass a dozen abbey gates, including those of the Carthusians and the Dominicans, as well as many inns, before reaching the *grande porte* of St. Bavon's.

Travellers, however, had preferences then, as now; and it so befell that two, coming from Bruges on a certain April evening, inquired not for the

nearest inn or hospice, but for St. Bavon's of which they had heard much.

The dusk was deep when they saluted the cross that marked the approach to the abbey domain, and turned their horses into the long avenue leading to the gatehouse. A broad roadway, lined with tall poplars, was flanked on either side by footpaths similarly bordered. On the south lay well-tilled fields, their rich black loam accurately furrowed and smelling of fresh-harrowed earth. To the north was the abbey fish-pond.

After the tumult in the city, the quiet of these pregnant fields, the stillness of this teeming water, the peaceful hush brooding over the whole domain, was of the very essence of rest.

Franz Hofer knocked; and within the lodge a porter, murmuring "*Deo gratias*" for the heaven-sent stranger, shuffled to the heavy oak door, drew the bolts, and fell on his knees before the strangers, saying: "*Benedicite.*"

When he had admitted the men and their beasts and made fast the gate, he rang a bell which announced to the abbot that guests were come.

The abbot of St. Bavon's was a very great per-

sonage. He kept a splendid retinue. When he travelled in state, he was attended by as many as one hundred persons. Scores of young noblemen were always in his household, receiving preparation to enter the University of Louvain. And besides the provision at the almonry, hard by the gate, for wayfarers having no scrip in their purses, the abbot had hospitality in his guest-house for several hundreds of persons and a few score of personages.

Nevertheless, his duties as head of a monastic establishment and his further duties as a high councillor of the realm, did not absolve him from hastening, at every summons, to the porter's lodge, to greet those whom heaven had sent and to conduct them to the gatehouse chapel for prayer.

Frederick, with all that he had heard of St. Bavon's Abbey, had been told, too, of this present abbot, who was celebrated for his skill as a huntsman. This celebrity gave Frederick no little amusement. Bred among the eagle crags of Carinthia, trained to the surefootedness of the chamois, he wondered what a paunchy churchman could do in a flat Netherlands country to win renown in the chase.

Obedient to his order's rules, the prelate threw himself at the feet of Frederick and Franz and thanked God for their coming. If there was no unction in the act, a reasonable man would condone the lack. For the abbot was but an hour returned from a journey to Ypres, where the hospice of St. Jean celebrated the two hundredth anniversary of its founding; and after a forty-mile ride was refreshing himself with venison pasty and full-bodied Burgundy wine, when the porter's summons rang.

Frederick smelled the savory, fruity vestiges and forgave the abbot for the celerity with which he got through the chapel ceremony. Indeed, he was more than forgiving therefor. And when the brother-hospitaller who accompanied the abbot took the newcomers in charge to make them comfortable, there was a smile of friendly understanding in the handsome young traveller's eyes as he responded to the benediction of his departing host.

Shrewd statesman that he was, the abbot was arrested by that smile.

"Here," was his instant thought, "is a man who is on terms of ease with prelates and other digni-

taries. Mayhap heaven hath indeed sent one who ought not to be suffered to feel himself an angel of whom we are unaware."

For in those days, either penitence was less acute than aforetime, or expression of it was less lavish; and a churchman had also to be a chancellor and find funds for the Kingdom of God. The building of great churches, the endowment of abbeys to conciliate heaven, was not undertaken by this generation. An altar-piece was now beginning to be considered a munificent gift; and abbey guests, departing, left so little in the way of offering, that one might think they had no traffic with heaven, nor wish to have any.

Therefore, the lodging given Frederick was of the sort St. Bavon's gave its guests of high degree; and he made closer acquaintance with those spicy and fruity flavours of which the abbot had been tantalizingly redolent. Also, when Franz Hofer made request for a small boat in which Frederick might explore the tortuous waterways of Ghent, the twistings of the Scheldt and of the Lieve and of the Lys, the brother-hospitaller attended promptly to this uncommon demand.

It was past midnight when the voyagers returned

to the abbey; and one of them was got with difficulty across the base-court to the guest-house. His descent had been less fortunate than his going up, at the château of the Counts of Flanders, and he had skinned and bruised himself against its scarred walls.

The next day the abbot of St. Bavon's was much occupied; but when he returned from the meeting of the Estates of Flanders, he paid a visit to his disabled guest.

The lack of convincingness in Frederick's account of his misadventure confirmed his host in the opinion that this young man was something other than an idle wanderer. That a man should wish to prowl nocturnally, the prelate took for granted. He was neither ascetic nor idealist, himself; and lenient, as men are who know their need of lenience.

But why the boat? And wherefore the injuries that were not sword-cuts nor such bruises as men get in brawls, but more like the hurts one might find upon—well, say upon a cavalier whose exit by her balcony had been precipitate; or upon an eavesdropper suddenly alarmed?

The abbot was inclined to suspect spying rather

than love-making, in spite of his guest's obvious fitness for romance; and he sought, as he mentioned his presence at the Council, to see if Frederick would betray interest in the day's events at the castle. Frederick did. He was evidently trying to seem only casually interested. But the abbot was satisfied with his own astuteness as outmatching Frederick's caution.

"What think you of the Lady of Burgundy's hope?" asked Frederick, making a wry face as he moved his sore body in bed.

The abbot smiled amusedly. A Fleming of the Flemings, he was as familiar with the temper and with the history of his race as with the traits and traditions of his own family. (He was a grandson of that proud and powerful patrician, Jodocus Vijdt, and rumour gave him Jan Van Eyck for his father; but young Isabella Vijdt was summarily married to a profligate scion of Gantois nobility who could not afford to decline this opportunity; and if the son too-soon born to her owed his paternity to the sublime artist, 'twas not thus set down in the baptistery record—only in the popular belief. And although Jan Van Eyck was supremely honoured by his sovereign and by

all the great nobles of his day, the Vijdts felt that they were doing well for Isabella when they persuaded Duke Philip of Burgundy to send Jan to Portugal with the embassy seeking Duke Philip a third wife, and got for Isabella a husband with a name that ranked high in Ghent. That the Vijdts and Burluuts and the Arnolfini would one day be known for nothing but their patronage of the Van Eycks was unthinkable; and Isabella's son, when he became abbot of St. Bavon's, fed his pride on his derivation from the Vijdts, and fostered not the lurkingest wish to feel that in his veins flowed the blood which gave Flemish art its greatest glory.)

"The Lady of Burgundy is young," he answered indulgently. "Young, and of an almost conventual inexperience Her first duty to the realm is to get a strong husband."

He was watching Frederick keenly from behind his screen of churchmanly detachment, and he decided that Frederick's interest in the affairs of Burgundy was beyond that of an ordinary traveller.

Later, he confirmed himself in this suspicion by sending one of his secretaries to follow Franz

Hofer when that worthy betook himself to the palace, with a note addressed to Duchess Margaret.

And when next day, the duchess came to St. Bavon's—where the Counts of Flanders had long held the right of hospitality—and asked to see the young gentleman of Falkenhorst, the abbot felt sufficiently sure that Frederick's presence had some state importance, to warrant him in keeping not only both his own eyes but those of several others open. The canons of hospitality, common as well as sacred, imposed some restrictions upon statecraftsmanship; but evading, without denying, canons was one of the principal studies of that day—as of many others—and the abbot of St. Bavon's was adept in it. Moreover, he held that his choice of a husband for the Duchess of Burgundy was inspired by pure patriotism and deep understanding of his country's needs.

Duchess Margaret brought but one lady-in-waiting, and only this one of her several attendants accompanied her across the base-court and into the guest-house; the others waited at the porter's lodge.

Abbot Anselm began, as soon as he had paid his respects, to chide her grace, deferentially, for not having sent him word that the young lord of Falkenhorst was a guest of the Crown.

"Nay, but he is not," she protested, conscious that the abbot knew she was ill at ease in the matter. "I have never seen the gentleman, and first heard of his existence less than two days ago. But one of my maids hath acquaintance with him —and was fain to—to see if aught can be done for his comfort and convenience."

Nothing could have been more palpably absurd. Margaret had protested with all her might against coming; but when she saw how determined to come Mary was, she deemed there was no other course than to accompany her. To make a secret of the visit seemed impossible; no woman who did not give account of herself would be admitted to the chamber of a man in St. Bavon's guest-house. Yet this flimsy pretext was, Margaret knew, worse than ridiculous—it was dangerous. All this she had urged against Mary's determination; but without avail.

The expression of credulous acquiescence in the abbot's face made her flame with resentment.

How dared he affront her intelligence with such a look? A wink of frank disbelief would have been less disrespectful.

Did he think that she, not four months widowed, was here on her own behalf, seeking such romantic adventure as several royal dames had lately scandalized Europe with? Or did he suspect the identity of the veiled and mute maid beside her?

Gentle and self-effacing though Margaret was, the blood of haughty old Cicely Nevill flowed in her veins; and for this once it flowed hotly, like lava fresh from Vulcan's forge-fires. Flaming in her face, it confessed her guilt not only of falsehood but of clumsy stupidity.

"Your highness," Abbot Anselm answered, bowing as in the presence of sanctity, rather than majesty, "is most wondrous kind. Permit me to serve in any way possible your gracious benevolence."

Margaret thanked him, and dismissed him with more imperiousness than was her wont.

A few moments later, she and her veiled companion were in the presence of the man for whose sake Burgundy's heiress was willing to go such lengths as this.

If she could have forgot her ire and her apprehension, Margaret would have been keenly interested to see the one who could make Mary defy the world. Almost, in spite of resentment and fear, she was responsive to that curiosity which has been stronger than prudence or obedience, since Eve fell.

Like everyone else who, seeing the effects of love, expects to find justification for them on beholding the cause, she thought to feel at once in Frederick that which Mary had so instantly felt. Never having known love, she was unaware how deep-hidden from all save the twain in love's bond are the sources of their mutual satisfaction and delight. No soul, yearning and growing towards hers from before the foundations of the world, had ever, in a transfiguring moment, stood revealed to her as her soul's eternal glory.

She thought to see in the blue of Frederick's eyes, in the gold of his sun-crowned head, in the grace of his body or the strength of his arms, that which made all other fairness as nothing to Mary; to hear in his voice the tones that drew her as the flute of Orpheus drew Eurydice; to feel in his talk that charm for which Mary spurned an imperial crown.

Instead, she found a man not so much more fair, she deemed, than any other, as to warrant madness in a girl besought by all Christendom. Nor did she, in her brief and constrained conversation with him, feel aught that to her seemed to explain why Burgundy's duchess, accustomed through all her young life to the cleverest and wittiest and most fascinating talk in the world, should find this young man's society worth hazarding a kingdom for.

Even those who have themselves known love, and how inexplicable are its mysteries, find it hard to realize that however close to their own the heart of a child or of a friend may beat, they cannot command their hearts to the same ecstatic rhythm nor calm the other's beating to accord with theirs.

But Margaret was in worse case even than the ordinary adviser of young love. They have too frequently forgotten; but she never knew.

Nevertheless, she marvelled at the exaltation of Mary's mood, and was not a little wistful as well as curious.

CHAPTER XIII

"SPRINGTIME IS BORN OF LOVERS"

THE apartment to which Frederick was designated consisted of two sleeping chambers and a goodly room for use as study or parlour or private dining-room. The furnishings were of a nice mean between monastic austerity and the luxurious elegance that many homes were beginning to show.

The life of the religious was as separate from what went on in the guest-house, as if miles rather than feet intervened. The only point of approach was in the church, the choir of which the brothers entered by a door from their great cloister, whereas the guests entered the nave by a small door opening from the guest-house into the north transept.

Around the base-court were all the buildings of general service. Out of sight of wayfarers, back of the church and the houses of the abbot and the abbey's guests, were the dormitories, the refectory,

the great and small cloisters, the library, the cells of the copyists, the vast cellars, the infirmary, the various buildings appertaining to the necessary labours of maintaining the abbey, and the enclosure-within-an-enclosure, where, in earth brought from Jerusalem, the brothers of the order were at last laid awaiting the trumpet that Gabriel shall blow summoning all men to their rewards.

Lay brothers served the guests; but otherwise the travelling public saw little of the monastic life that went on in the hidden quarters. At the almost incessant services in the church, one caught glimpses of many tonsured heads above dark cowls in the vast choir, and heard magnificent antiphony from many throats, in chants and in responses. But if the monks felt the presence of the world beyond the massive, locked gates of the choir, not a note of recognition strayed forth to betray a thought that was not wholly bent on heaven.

The April sun was more than mild this morning, and Frederick—who stifled within doors on this glorious spring day—had his chair drawn close beside an opened window in his sitting-room, and there sat looking down at two lay brothers who were setting out lilies in borders against the low

buildings of grey stucco that lined the base-court. His furred travelling cloak was thrown over him, concealing his bed-gown of dark crimson cloth, open at the strong, white throat. His right leg rested on a cushioned stool, easing his strained tendons and wrenched ankle; and as he shifted, from time to time, his posture, a wince of exquisite pain convulsed his features.

When he heard that her highness, the duchess-dowager of Burgundy was honouring him with a visit, he swore roundly the most knightly oaths he knew, at the fate which chained him to a chair. For well he guessed who accompanied her; and it was not thus he would have had her see him.

Nevertheless, it was a glory to see her in any event, and trebly a glory to think she had hastened to him when his note told her why he could not seek her out.

That the Duchess Margaret accompanied her argued, or so it seemed to him, either great concern or great affection—or mayhap both. Was, then, his dear maid so high in royal favour? She must have pleaded to the duchess for her heart's desire. And here was the exalted lady come to see what manner of man he seemed who was sweet Mary's

preferred suitor. Alack that he must lie before them like a broken lance!

His discomfiture was evident; yet Margaret knew it was not caused by her estate but rather by his condition. Like Abbot Anselm, she felt that in him which bespoke accustomedness to persons of rank higher than his statement of himself accounted for. Who was he? Whence had he come? What had he learned, through Mary, of Burgundy's plight?

Her conversation with him was chill with constraint, with suspicion. Mary's ready faith in this man astounded her. Not for Margaret of Burgundy to comprehend was that mystic nature of love which thrives upon faith and grows great only when it is greatly tested. He who alone of all the world might have taught her that had never crossed her path; or, crossing it, had never been recognized.

"Our maid, the Lady Mary, would express her kindly pity for your mischance," she said, after her first formal greeting. And when Mary, still veiled, stepped forward, Margaret turned her back, and withdrew to the farthest window whence she could look out, above the abbey walls,

to the triple avenue of poplar trees and the well-tilled fields that flanked the Antwerp road.

With a swift, almost darting movement, Mary was at his side, her veil thrown back, her lovely face alight with that maternal solicitude which is one of the divinest qualities of woman's love.

"My lord," she murmured, tenderly, "what happened thee?"

He smiled radiantly up at her.

"Dazzled by what I saw in the pale starlight, I came tumbling down, like the men of Tirol whom the sunlight blinds as they climb after eagles' nests. A wrench, a bruise—that is all; a poor price to pay for what I got. And you! Has it been well with you, dear heart?"

She knelt beside him and laid her head against his shoulder.

"My heart sings hopefully," she answered, speaking low. "But only God knoweth what shall come to pass."

Her glance wandered just once from his eager face to where Margaret had seated herself in the window embrasure with her back turned toward them; after that, she seemed unconscious of any presence but his. He who filled for her not only

all the world, but all eternity, easily excluded from her thoughts that dear, tenderly familiar figure at the other end of the long room.

He held her close against him; and so easily did the gracious outlines of her body fit the hollow his arm and shoulder made when curved to clasp her, it seemed they must at the same time have been chiselled, by the same master-hand, each made to complement the other and thus to achieve perfectness.

"My heart," he murmured, "how strange is this our circumstance! The world is bursting with spring; love and life leap, everywhere, in the veins of the quick, the young. In my mind, we somehow started all this—you and I! The universe o'erflows with what our souls cannot contain. Who started other springtimes, I wot not; but only know the spring is born of lovers, and not, as dullards say, lovers made by the spring. And as no others ever had such love as God has given us, so there was never yet on earth another spring so beautiful. The larks this morning had a new note of ecstasy; and my heart tells me that in Provence and Italy, the nightingales are singing as they have never sung since Messer Dante's love

set those lands of enchantment throbbing forevermore. Yet here we sit, Beloved, in a sterile place where men try to deny the spring, or to forget it. I, bound by many chains—and thou, likewise—while all the world thrills and pulses and blossoms and sings with the glory our hearts have spilled. If I were high in heaven, as God is, dispensing and distraining among men, it seems to me I would make a special Providence for them that greatly love. They bring so much of heaven into the world! But what story of great love is not a story of great suffering? Why, when our souls were made by God as one, did He set such awesome barriers between us?"

Mary had entertained the self-same wonderment. But love was teaching her, among many things, that woman's vision must see farther into the eternal mysteries than man can see unaided by her—else her great office for him is unfilled. Reading his riddles for him, as God gives her grace, she must never seem, to the man loving her, other than one to whom God would be likelier to reveal precious truths than to himself.

Her great brown eyes shone, now, with this old wisdom that was new to her.

"Dear," she answered, with certitude as if this doctrine had been her study for long years, "love's measure is what it can overcome. How else can any one call love great than for what it hath endured to claim its own? Do clods of heavy loam such as the oxen-drawn ploughshares were upturning in the fields beside the road as I came here, smother the life of the smallest mustard-seed? Or does it struggle through soil whose weight stalls mighty bullocks, to blossom and to bear? Shall that eternal thing which God hath given us, be less potent than a grain of mustard-seed?"

He listened to her wonderingly—as well he might, indeed! and such was the pure rapture in her lovely face that he was moved by it to an ecstasy more spiritual than any he had ever known. The satin softness of her white skin, the quickened pulsing in her throat, the tender swell of her bosom, were not unnoticed by him, but they were transcended by the thing that only supreme love knows: the call of her soul to his, stirring in him the desire not merely to have and to hold her, but for her sake to be the bravest, worthiest, gentlest knight that ever won a lady's love. A man can scarce live to any age of self-

understanding, and not know that wherever he may go upon the earth there will always, in all likelihood, be women who can, and will, set his desire tingling. Though he may hide himself in caves, like an anchorite, he cannot hide from his memories nor his dreams. But if a man's heart be set rather upon finding an ideal than upon escaping temptation, then it may so hap to him that he will weigh women less by what they have to offer of one sort, and more by what they have not to offer, of another sort.

Poet, dreamer that he was, Frederick had always taken for granted that the lady he would love would be very beautiful; to him that was as foregone as that she would be white, not black, and Christian, not infidel. His quest, therefore, was not for one to delight his eyes, merely; but for her who should inspire him to do all those great and splendid things whereunto his soul yearned, but—of itself—insufficiently.

"My heart," he said, reverently, "of a surety God speaks to me through thy lips. I feel His presence, hear His voice, as Moses did beside the burning bush. For years my prayers have been: 'Give me great things to do. Make me of those who lead

men splendidly to heights they yearned toward unavailingly—waiting for me.' I dreamed of a new knighthood—of a last Crusade, to drive the Turk from Constantine's city and restore the Holy Roman Empire. Mayhap for that God will one day use me. But we know that other Crusades failed because the men who led them schemed for selfish ends—their spirit was not right for their holy enterprise. They bartered themselves in marriage—even the Lion-Heart who else, I think, had wrested from Saladin our Lord's sepulchre. I shall be true, God helping me, to thee and to my love. And it may be I shall write thy name and mine large on the page of men's remembrance, because I shall show forth so gloriously what love is and what love can do."

Kneeling beside him, Mary bent her head. He knew she prayed; and, clasping his hands on hers, he, also, prayed.

"I may not be able to come here again," she whispered when she had risen to her feet and was bending above him. "If I could brave a danger that was mine alone, it were different. But others must share it—I tremble to think how much! Here is my favour, for thy heart to wear: the first

small curl cut from my baby head—the head that even then was waiting for the crown of thy love. Give me, to treasure, something thou hast worn; and then—if silence fall between us—never doubt that I am thine while this pledge bides with me."

From the pocket of his travelling cloak he drew a glove. She kissed it, and held it against her cheek, then next her heart. Then, lifting a corner of his cloak, she pressed her lips to it reverently.

"A kiss to carry with you," she said, smiling bravely though her eyes were tear-filled and her sweet mouth quivered.

Reaching toward her with both arms, he seemed as if he could not let her go.

She clung to him, for a long minute, fighting back the sobs that tore her throat. Then, with one last kiss, she fled into the hall, dropping her veil as she stumbled through the door.

Margaret turned, as she heard the door opened.

Frederick was sitting with his head drooped against the high back of his chair. His eyes were closed, and he seemed not to notice her hurried passing, nor to hear her short adieu.

CHAPTER XIV

THE ROAD TO ARRAS

THE belfry chimes were ringing the quarter-hour past nine when the Chancellor of Burgundy and Lord Humbercourt left the royal palace to prepare for their secret journey. Hugonet's favourite residence was at Ypres, but he maintained houses also in Bruges, in Ghent, in Brussels, Lille, Dijon, and Paris—as, indeed, a man had need to do who so importantly served the court of Burgundy. Under Duke Philip, the Burgundian court moved pompously from place to place in the wide domain, carrying enormous quantities of trappings—apparel, jewels, tapestries, plate, napery—and producing in each tarrying place much the effect of a kermess. The town became *en fête* for a week and a day. Then the restless sovereign decreed a change, and the glittering cavalcade wound off, leaving the townsfolk to their humdrum routine.

Duke Charles moved his court less; his camp being —for so much of his nine-year reign—his habitat, and too actively militant to have real court flavour. Yet he demanded that the utmost magnificence and evidence of wealth and power be maintained not only about himself, wherever he might be, but about all who belonged to him or in anywise represented him. Louis XI. of France was reputed throughout Europe to recompense prodigally those who served him. Therefore the splendid brother-in-law of that mean-visaged, mean-appareled monarch, must be reputed to reward his servants even more lavishly—not only because it was Charles's chief aim to outdo in everything the hated King of France, but because the allegiance of most men in those days was a matter of the highest price; and that prince secured the shrewdest councillors who promised the best pay. The defection of Philippe de Commines from the Burgundian to the French court, still rankled. Charles knew that Louis had made strong pleas to Hugonet and Humbercourt to win them from their allegiance; but he believed that Louis had failed. It is not probable that Charles fancied this was because they were incorruptible,

or whole-heartedly devoted to the duke or to Burgundy; he was three-and-forty when he died, and it is doubtful if he could remember so far back as the time when he thought any man was incorruptible. He laid these lords' continued service to Burgundy, to their judgment that Burgundy was better worth serving than France. To this end he encouraged them to feel the utmost power and importance; and the Chancellor, when he travelled through the realm, was wont to maintain a state second only to Charles's own.

In no state, however, would he fare forth this night to Arras to see the French King.

When he and Humbercourt were come to the Chancellor's mansion in Ghent, they went straightway to the private *cabinet du travail* of Hugonet and, making sure that they could not be overheard, began to lay plans for their journey.

Neither man deceived himself, nor the other, as to the result if the Estates of Flanders learned of this that they were to do. But neither man missed a single point in his calculation of what the exigency was: Burgundy for Guelders and the Netherlanders, or Burgundy for the French Burgundians of whom they two were the chief!

"We ride alone," said Hugonet.

The Lord of Humbercourt looked at him admiringly; for the Chancellor was a man made for statecraft and not for war nor yet for self-defence against such dangers as might befall one who rode at night, unescorted, on an errand like this. But Hugonet preferred the chances of attack by robbers or other wanderers, to the chances of betrayal; and not even in his own household was there a man whose loyalty and prudence he felt he could trust in a time when everything that either man had or hoped to have trembled in the balance that a girl's hand held.

"I shall leave word, here, that I am going to Ypres," Hugonet continued. "There will be wonder as to why I went alone—but there is always wonder; and I prefer that to other risks At eleven I shall pass out through the Porte de Courtrai."

Humbercourt nodded acquiescence, and took his leave. He was a grave man, little given to words, but commanding when he did speak. He had been a favoured councillor in Liége before the Liégois rebelled against their prince-bishop who was Duke Charles's brother-in-law; but when they sought

relief from that dissolute prelate's misrule and put themselves under the protection of France, they turned against Humbercourt because he was Charles's lieutenant in those parts, and took him prisoner along with the bad bishop—whereupon the Burgundian duke promptly made the French king prisoner at Peronne, and furnished Sir Walter Scott with the principal episode of *Quentin Durward!* It was not Humbercourt who executed Charles's most terrible vengeance upon Liége; but he was always blamed for it not alone by the Walloons, but by the Brabantois and the Flemings. They all hated him—almost as much as they hated Hugonet on whose counsel Charles had more than once defied their Estates, crying: "Fatheads! Numbskulls! You have always either hated or despised your prince. I prefer your hatred to your contempt."

It behooved both men to dare supremely against the Netherlands.

When the Chancellor was alone, he got out the great seal of Burgundy and affixed it to the letter Mary had given him. Then, with a sharp knife he ripped a seam in the lining of his coat and bestowed the letter where it could be found only

when he was no longer able to protect it with his liberty or his life.

All his movements were quick, but precise. He was almost daintily made, with remarkably fine patrician hands which he used effectively. His features were small and finely chiselled. His skin was of smooth texture and rosy with healthfulness and good care. The frostiness of his hair gave an effect less of age than of added brilliance to his appearance. The sparkle of his intensely blue eyes was a little cold, but very bright. The impression he made was that of a type evolved only by generations of aristocratic breeding. To the very astute it might occur that the idea he gave was of aptness and accuracy in executing the will of another, and that if he had a will of his own for his own ends, no one could ever guess it.

Straight as a crow's flight lay the road from Ghent to Courtrai, five-and-twenty miles, and on all the length of it only one village: Deynze. The course of the river Lys—nature's link between the cities—was exceeding tortuous; but man in the days when Rome's legions were making these places outposts of the Eternal City laid an un-

swerving highway, which the river touched and drew away from, twoscore times or more, like a coquette who never tires of the game. But well she knew—this river whose blue lilies were the insignia of France—how far she dared to go in following her own sweet, wayward will; for in all the world beside there is no water so full of magic for the retting of flax.

The guard at the Porte de Courtrai readily passed out, that night, a lone rider who showed authorization from the Lord Chancellor to go to Oudenaarde. The belfry chimes had just rung the hour before midnight; and, like an echo, the bells of the Biloque Abbey, outside the walls, answered the belfry, as Hugonet's horse stepped upon the drawbridge over the Lys.

The massive oak gates, heavily studded with iron nails, had scarce closed behind him, when another wayfarer presented himself at their inner side and was permitted to pass as one of the *francs bourgeois* living beyond the fortifications.

Half a league westward, the second horseman overtook the first.

The night was very clear, and the country very still. Unnumbered legions of the starry host

marched high overhead, but no sound of their tramp-tramping reached to the Courtrai road. Millions of shoots of new life struggled through the rich, heavy loam of Flanders and greeted the constellations joyously, but inaudibly. The river, gorged with spring rains and melted snows, flowed drowsily between its alder-fringed banks. At long intervals, a screech owl rent the silence with his jagged cry. And now and then a watch-dog would bark, not sharply but with growling suspicion, in some walled farmstead the road passed. Other sound there was none, save the sploshing of two horses' hoofs in the spring mire of the highway.

Fear was foreign to both these men. Yet neither of them failed to estimate what danger for himself and for others might lurk in any thicket of young willows—not to mention those stretches of woodland the road led through. They spoke not at all, but kept close together; and each man listened and looked alertly.

At Deynze, the old church had a small shrine set in the grey stone wall, and a glimmer of light burning in blue glass at the feet of Our Lady. Each rider, passing this, drooped his head for a moment and asked holy intercession on behalf of

his errand. Hour after hour wore on. Presently the giant arms of the windmills became distinct from the darkness in which they had been lying motionless; and, stirred by the breeze that heralds dawn, began to turn creakingly. Rooks cawed in the tall poplars that bordered the road. The silhouette of a stork poised on a thatched roof stood faintly out against the smoked pearl of dissolving night; and then, suddenly, the red in his legs and bill was visible. Grey mist lifted from the fields, uncovering a shimmer of new green. A chorus of twittering woke in a thousand nests.

As they neared Courtrai, the red, conical roofs of the great Broel towers showed their colour softly against the pearly sky and above the pearly river; and a multitude of daws screamed in their wheeling flight about the towers' tall weather-vanes.

Not the earliest marketman was ahead of them as they crossed the Lys by the old stone bridge the Broel towers defended, and rode down the short street leading to Notre Dame. Of the Château of the Counts of Flanders, built by that Baldwin who set out thence to conquer Jerusalem and become head of the Holy Roman Empire, little remained; but Baldwin's church had escaped the vengeful

fire wherewith the French had destroyed much of Courtrai, nearly a century ago, and the clergy of Notre Dame felt that theirs was the right to give hospitality to or for the Crown of Flanders. So to their shelter the Chancellor of Burgundy and Minister Humbercourt directed their weary steeds; and there they had sleep until the sun was high; when, with fresh mounts, they resumed their journey.

Beneath the Courtrai walls, not far from Notre Dame, lay that Bloody Marsh wherein, upon a May morning five or six generations ago, the flower of French chivalry went down to death and defeat before the weavers of Bruges and Ypres and Ghent, until twenty thousand dead choked the morass and left no great house in all France unrepresented in that grim harvest. How would it be now, if the French came marching northward from Arras, less than twoscore miles away? Would Flemings go again among the slain, gathering up hundreds of golden spurs to hang upon the walls of Notre Dame? Or would the Lion of Flanders trail in the dust and the lilies of France flaunt in the breeze?

At Lille, twelve miles farther on their journey,

the travellers rested again, not in Hugonet's house in the Place St. Martin, nor in the splendid palace of the Burgundian dukes, but in the Hospice Comtesse where they did not disclose their identity. The hour of vespers saw them on their way again, jogging out the Porte de Bethune on the road to Arras, in a pouring rain.

Full five hours' riding lay before them. Humbercourt was not weary, but the Chancellor was. Not many men would essay to ride five-and-sixty-miles in twenty-four hours, however desperate the need of haste; and neither of these men was young. Yet Hugonet was more eager even than Humbercourt to stand that night before the King of France.

Sore and stiff and scarce able to leave their saddles, they drew rein, about ten o'clock, at the farthest outposts of the besieging army, and confirmed their suspicions: the faubourgs, unable to defend themselves, had indeed surrendered to Louis; but Crèvecœur still held the walled city for Burgundy.

CHAPTER XV

THE FOX'S LAIR

It was Humbercourt who took the lead, now; in a camp his mind was not acquiescent but dictatorial.

To the sentinel who challenged their further approach, he said simply that they had no countersign, but brought tidings from the north. To the captain of the guard, when he was summoned, Humbercourt repeated this, adding a request to be taken to headquarters. At headquarters, he asked to see the king.

Both Humbercourt and the Burgundian Chancellor were as thoroughly acquainted with Louis XI. of France as any one could be. Their opportunities for studying him had been various, since he came, exiled and poor, to the court of his uncle of Burgundy, twenty years ago, and was handsomely provided for by Duke Philip.

"You are entertaining a fox who will one day use his knowledge of your roost to steal your chickens," warned King Charles VII.—who, if he was not a very wise man, seems at least to have known his own son.

Each of them gauged accurately Louis's cowardice and his bravado, his cunning and his superstitious fear, his diplomacy and his ruthlessness. That he would use them or sacrifice them with equal indifference to their preference or interest, both men were perfectly aware. They had no illusions about him.

Humbercourt could almost, had he been given leave, have located for himself, in the camp around Arras, France's monarch—and that without waste of many steps. But he was not given leave! No Burgundians were being permitted to present their remonstrances to the invader of their realm.

When the officer of the night had satisfied himself that the king wished to see the Burgundians, he sent an under-officer who led the way to the royal presence.

The streets of the Arras faubourgs were not so narrow as those within the city walls, but they were more deeply mired, and darker.

Their dwellings, shops, and social gathering places were mean. The persons who, in such unsettled times, chose to live beyond the fortifications were actuated either by poverty which sought to evade city taxes, or by purposes which sought to evade city law. Those who had possessions to guard, or peaceful ways to pursue, were likely to seek the protection of the city.

Charles the Bold, had he been besieging Arras, would have had his quarters in some near-by château, or in a splendid tent hung with cloth of gold and tapestries, thick-carpeted, and furnished with such luxury as a magnificent monarch could command when campaigning. Humbercourt thought of the four hundred tents taken by the Swiss after Charles's rout at Granson, and of their silk and velvet fittings with embroidery of gold and pearls; he thought of the three hundred complete services of magnificent silver plate left behind by Charles's nobles on that field; and of the wagon-loads of fine bed-linens, the great rolls of cloth of gold, the coffers of fabulous jewels. Thus Burgundy's late duke went to war. Not so his cousin of France!

The Burgundian ministers, who had left their

horses in the keeping of the captain of the guard, ploughed wearily through the clayey mire, following their guide. It was not possible to see much, but a very babel of revelry assailed their ears; every house seemed gorged to bursting with the ribaldry of waiting soldiers, restrained from naught but fighting the enemy.

From the cracks of warped wooden shutters, thin edges of feeble light cut the black mirk dully, like blunt blades. Rain dripped from the low eaves, most of which a tall man could touch with his uplifted hand, and flowed into the furrows and puddles of the miry road. Smells of sour wines and coarse cooking hung in the heavy damp air.

Before a low, stuccoed house, not better favoured than most of its neighbours, the guide of the Burgundians stopped, and rapped sharply—twice, then thrice—with his knuckles on the upper panel of the door. In a moment, this panel opened inward and Tanneguy Duchâtel stood framed in the opening, like a half-length portrait, against a background dimly lighted and rude. His recognition of Humbercourt and the Chancellor of Burgundy was immediate; but he was too well seasoned a courtier to call them by name, or to do any-

thing more than beckon them in and dismiss, with a gesture, their escort.

On long wooden benches before the hearth sat two men, their shadows silhouetted by the firelight on the roughly plastered wall behind them. One was a warrior of the type developed by fierce, rushing assaults upon walled cities or moated castles. In the new warfare which heavy siege artillery was making so different from the old, Raoul de Lannoy might be outmatched by a slighter man with better tactics of long-range fighting. But in any close-encounter, any personal prowess test, he was one of the romantic Invincibles of an earlier day. His bulk was not fat, but bone and hard muscle. Beside him the other man looked as insignificant as a terrier beside a mastiff. It was their contrasting shadows on the wall that impressed, even more than their actual persons, the shrewdly reflective mind of Hugonet.

The majesty of France, as of other nations, has so often been vested in men ill-favoured for the kingly part, that nature might be suspected of a satirical democracy—were it not equally true that she has as often failed to cast in the heroic mould men who made themselves leaders of their kind.

Louis XI. had no aid of nature to make him look a king; he was short, with a squat body and thin, rickety legs; his shoulders were disproportionately broad and high, and his neck was so set into them that he had an almost humpbacked appearance; his features were sharp and mean, the mouth weakly cruel and the long nose so pointed as to suggest an extraordinarily keen scent for chicken-roosts. His skin was of the greenish-grey cast he affected in his dress—a few shades lighter, but all of a hue with his weather-stained felt hat and its leaden image of Notre Dame de Clêry, and his fustian clothes. Only one note of colour was there anywhere about him, and that was the intense blue of his eyes—not a deep or sapphire blue, but the blue of forget-me-nots or of June skies while the sun is high. The image of him, evoked in the mind of any who knew him, began with those two bits of blue and their changing lights; then took on this feature and that. Perhaps it was through those small windows that there came the impression of power. But however it came, no one could look long at Louis XI. and not know that he was a master of men. The manner of his mastery might

inspire no respect; but he got what he wanted—usually.

When he glanced toward the door and saw Hugonet, his blue eyes gleamed for a moment with an expression which Lannoy the fearless fighter was far too simple to read. Before any one else was close enough to read his countenance it was inscrutable.

Duchâtel approached the king and in a low voice named those who sought audience.

"A thick night, my lords!" Louis called out to them casually, as if their presence gave him no surprise. "Come to the fire. Hey, wench! Where are you? Mull two stoups of malmsey, and spice it, for these gentlemen."

A blowsy girl who, on hearing the knock at the door, had retired into a shadowy corner beyond the built-in and curtained bed came forward without shyness and obeyed the king's behest.

Hugonet and Humbercourt saluted the majesty of France with ceremonious respect, and sat themselves stiffly down where Louis indicated.

"Hard riding in the north roads?" he queried, noting their soreness.

"At this hour yesternight, your majesty, we were in Ghent," Hugonet answered.

Louis lifted his eyebrows in mild surprise.

"I trust our godchild, the demoiselle of Burgundy, hath suffered no mischance," he said, fervently.

Not even the acute ear of Hugonet could detect a note of irony in the king's voice.

"The Lady of Burgundy suffers many things," he averred. "In effect, she is a prisoner of the Gantois, who demand her marriage with the Duke of Guelders."

Louis smiled in contempt of the Flemings and their demands.

"It is our wish, as ye well know, to wed our dearest godchild with our only son, the dauphin; then, when they jointly wear the crown of greater France, to retire from this world's pomps and vanities, and serve Heaven."

Not by the flicker of an eyelash did either of Mary's ministers betray how little they believed this promise of abdication.

"Her highness, sore distraught, turns to your majesty, and to you only, for relief and counsel," Hugonet replied. "The Duke of Guelders is

abhorrent to her, not only because of their relationship, but also for that he was so cruel a son, and is in nowise the sort of man a tender and beautiful princess should wed. His name smells evilly in every part of Europe. The heart of her highness, as your majesty well knows, is French; the blood that flows from it is the royal blood of France. Hemmed in by those who hate France, she sends her cry to you by us. Her desire is for peace—such peace as your puissance can best assure. We bring your majesty her greeting."

Therewith he dropped upon one knee before King Louis, and made him deep obeisance; then handed to the king that letter, sealed with the great seal of Burgundy, which Mary had given him.

"Our dear child's plight," Louis said when he had read it, "commands our tenderest pity. She shall have aid of us, and that shortly. Our thanks to you, her faithful friends, for this your swift journey, bringing her appeal. You are most weary. May we give you such hospitality as our camp provides? Or have you, peradventure, counsel of the Lady for her Governor, Crèvecœur, who holds against us the fair city of Arras?"

The question's significance was plain to the ministers of Burgundy. That night, they slept in the Abbey of St. Vaast, within the walls, hard by the palace of the Governor. And on the morrow, the drawbridge of every porte in Arras was lowered to span the moat, while the gates were opened wide to admit the soldiers of France; but King Louis entered through a breach he had made in the walls, no longer defended.

"The Lady of Burgundy so orders," the wondering citizens were told.

And some were glad, some were sorry; each according as his personal interest was served by allegiance to the French king or the Burgundian duchess.

CHAPTER XVI

"STRANGE MISCHIEF BREWING"

NOTHING was so precious to Louis the XI of France as a man he had bought. His appreciation of good servants seemed in proportion rather to what they had cost him than to what they could do for him. Especially did he value those he had been able to buy from another allegiance; and most especially of all, those he won over from the superb court of Burgundy.

Life was not very full of pleasantness for this feared and hated man who may or may not have realized the stupendous service he was rendering civilization in breaking up feudalism. Not one creature in all the world of men and beasts loved or trusted him. If he had, for his sustaining, a prevision of what France and all Europe were to reap from the frightfulness he sowed, no one who knew him has left us any hint thereof. That

he was merely bloodthirsty—hunting men to the death as he hunted boars and stags—not the stupidest of those surrounding him ever supposed. But what, beyond the greed of conquest, animated him, not even the cleverest of his councillors seems to have surmised.

It was, however, known to all Europe that the King of France had an extraordinary delight in buying men, and that he had for this kingly sport an aptitude unexcelled. Every man knew this about Louis XI. and yet, such was his diplomacy, he did not put men greatly on their guard against him; and also, when they had concluded their bargain with him, he never let them feel themselves to have been bought. He knew too well the ill effects of making a man acknowledge to himself that he is a traitor and a rogue.

Philip of Crèvecœur, Lord des Cordes, knew King Louis well. He had hunted with him in the forest of Genappe, during the years of Louis's exile and dependence on the bounty of his *bel oncle;* he had gone, in Duke Philip's glittering train, to Rheims to see Louis crowned, and to Paris to see him make his "joyous entry"; he had been sent, by Charles the Bold, to conduct Louis to Peronne on

that one occasion when the Fox of France had been outmatched in wits and made prisoner by his cousin of Burgundy; and he had been with the king and the duke at Liége.

A handsome man, tall and splendidly proportioned, Crèvecœur appealed mightily to the eye of the mean little king who had just acquired his services. Although a gallant soldier, Crèvecœur was primarily a statesman—an elegant diplomat, an agreeable courtier, an able and popular executive. He was a Knight of the Golden Fleece, and the handsomest man in the Order.

Louis XI. could have licked his chops in appreciative gusto, over this latest feast of his predatory soul.

The two men sat together in private council, on the morning after Louis's entry into Arras. Crèvecœur had placed his palace at the disposal of his new sovereign, and was—truth to tell—rather boring Louis with the elaborateness of the deference he was showing him.

It was a little before ten o'clock—the hour at which the principal meal of the day was then served—and the King of France was presently to make to his court, as there constituted, an interesting an-

nouncement, the details of which he was now confirming with the Lord des Cordes.

Louis was still in the frowsy fustian he had been wearing in the hovel when the Chancellor of Burgundy and Lord Humbercourt found him. The weather-stained felt hat, with its leaden image of Notre Dame de Cléry, was pulled down on his head as if he were in the field, and from under its peak his eyebrows bristled like an ill-kept thatch. His surcoat was short, reaching but midway of his thighs, and his crooked, unstable-looking legs, in their long hose, were defiantly in evidence. In the high-backed Gothic chair of state, under the superb canopy of Venetian velvet, Louis looked as grotesquely mean as a tipsy tinker in a king's bed—and knew it, and enjoyed the knowledge.

Crèvecœur's costume was dignified in the extreme, and elegant. His surcoat was long, and the velvet of which it was made was the colour of rich old Burgundy wine. Broad bands of embroidery wrought in gold and pearls edged it; and about his neck was the gorgeous collar of the Golden Fleece.

More French than Louis himself was Crèvecœur, whose ancestral estates in lower Picardy

had been French territory when he was born, but had passed to Burgundy, while he was a youth, by the treaty of Arras which entailed them upon the heirs male of the Burgundian dukes. Technically, Crèvecœur became a French subject upon the death of Charles without male issue; and Arras reverted to the French crown. But he had accepted from Mary the confirmation of all those estates and offices he held from her father, and taken an oath of fealty to her. Therefore he defended Arras for Burgundy against France, making himself a traitor to Louis; until Hugonet and Humbercourt, showing him Mary's letter as their warrant, ordered him to suffer the reversion of her claims. Those about him whose opinion it was that Crèvecœur was a time-server believed that when the Burgundian ministers gave this order they gave him also assurance that Louis would overlook his defiance and reward his surrender. Those whose opinion it was that Crèvecœur was incorruptible believed that he had obeyed what he thought were his sovereign's orders, without fear or favour.

Only four persons knew; and of these, two were at that moment on the road to Lille.

Not a trace of resentment was in Louis's manner; nor was there the smallest evidence of gloating.

"The Lady of Burgundy's letter was a surprise to you?" he said—the interrogative inflection just enough to express such mild curiosity as an almost disinterested person might have.

Crèvecœur inclined his handsome head gravely.

"Yes, sire," he answered; "though why it should have been, I know not. Her highness's acceptance of your majesty's protection ought rather to have been looked for than not."

"So," Louis observed, still without intensity, "it seemed to me."

His tone was as casual as if he had remarked that the weather was clearing, in accordance with his expectation.

"Our god-daughter," he went on, "was a gentle mistress, and generous——" He paused, reflectively. Crèvecœur knew what he was expected to say—and he knew how to avoid it dexterously.

"No bride," he answered, as if he thought himself to be replying directly, "could be more worthy of the dauphin of France."

Louis was delighted; this was his favourite game; as a pastime he preferred it to hunting; and as business—the business he conceived his to be—he relished the doing of it so enormously that he would have put all his powers to it even had the profits been inconsiderable.

"The dauphin," observed King Louis, speaking with the fervour of a doting father, "is doubly fortunate in that, with a beautiful and gracious spouse, he acquires also the services of some of those councillors and administrators who know so well how to govern the Burgundian portions of that which shall be greater France. It will be his wish and, I am sure, that of her highness, that the Lord des Cordes continue Governor of Picardy and Artois, Seneschal of Ponthieu, Captain of Crotoy, Governor of Peronne, Montdidier and Roye, and Captain of Boulogne and Hesdin."

Louis's voice could fairly drip, at times, with honey; and these titles, as they rolled from his tongue, made a drowsy, pleasant murmur that was most sweetly soothing.

Crèvecœur looked soothed, and grateful. Not by the most infinitesimal flicker of a lash did he betray whether he felt or did not feel wonder that

Louis should offer him governorships and captaincies which he did not control—as yet.

He expected Crèvecœur to deliver these cities and provinces to France—and then to accept, for France, the task of holding them loyal.

"My lord the king honours me very greatly," said Crèvecœur, dropping upon one knee before the ferrety little man in fustian.

With a gesture so superbly royal it would have amazed any man less accustomed to Louis XI. of France, the king bade Crèvecœur arise.

"We march, tomorrow, against Hesdin," he announced casually; "and after that, on to Boulogne. The Marshal of France will have conference with you touching this expedition."

Crèvecœur bowed obedience; and, at Louis's signal, stepped to the door to notify the chamberlain that the King of France would receive his courtiers.

Immediately, there entered a motley crowd. There was Tanneguy Duchâtel, whom Crèvecœur had first seen when Tanneguy and the Cardinal Balue came to Peronne to arrange a meeting between the Duke of Burgundy and the King of

France. (The Cardinal had now, for eight years, been imprisoned in the dungeons of Loches, in one of those iron cages he himself had invented, in which it was impossible for a man to stand upright or to stretch himself at length.) There was Oliver le Dain, valet de chambre and chief barber to the king and ennobled by Louis, who loved to thrust this vulgar Fleming of the pomade-pot upon those who could least stomach him. There was Robinet le Bœuf, who had been Louis's valet and was now one of the gentlemen of the king's household. There was Jean du Fou, Lord du Lude and Governor of Dauphiny, chamberlain to the king and on terms of familiarity with him since their school days together. There was the Bastard of Bourbon, Admiral of France, married to Jeanne, one of the natural daughters of Louis XI. There was Pierre Doriole, son of a burgess, and risen by Louis's favour to be Chancellor of France. And there was Pierre de Rohan, the Lord of Gie, who was Marshal of France; and Jean d'Estonteville, Lord of Torcy and grand master of the king's crossbowmen.

There entered also the gentlemen of the household of Philip de Crèvecœur. And to them all, the

king announced the fealty of the Governor of Artois.

When everyone present had saluted the Lord des Cordes of France, Jean du Fou made known to the king that certain ambassadors from Brabant, Hainault, Flanders, and Artois waited on his majesty.

From under the ragged thatch of brows, Louis's blue eyes winked with a maniacal mirth and cunning. There was strange trouble a-brewing.

"We will receive the ambassadors after dinner," he drawled with languid insolence. "I am hungry —and the larder of the Lord des Cordes is celebrated."

CHAPTER XVII

A LETTER CHANGES HANDS

Louis XI.'s dislike of pomp and ceremony was especially intense with regard to table etiquette. Loose in his own manners, and impatient of any but loose company, he refused to be bored at table of all places. He liked to eat, and to drink; but the atmosphere in which he insisted on gratifying his tastes was as tavern-like as his will could make it; if women were present, he abated for them not one whit his tap-room talk, but rather delighted in teasing their modesty, if they had any, with special grossness.

Although he carried with him even on his campaigns, a retinue of butlers, squire-carvers, first-cellarers, grand pantlers, chief stewards, and the like, the business of these persons was rather to minimize ceremony than to increase it; and among them Louis had many boon companions of the

sort he dared to make so free with because there was that in him which forbade presumption, or, at least, very promptly punished it.

The dinner to which the king's company now sat down in the stately Gothic banqueting hall of the governor's palace was served by a multitude of attendants, but their number was for the acceleration of service, not for the elaboration of it. So that every man might choose his favourites, in testing his capacity, there was a great variety offered in every course. There was soup of hare, and veal broth with herbs, and a sort of potage of eels thickened with flour, spiced with ginger, saffron, and cinnamon and sprinkled with pomegranate seeds. There were roasts of milk-fed veal; of beef sirloin, and of roe-deer. There was stuffed capon, and baked boar's ham in jelly, and pâte of turtle-doves. There were salads of endive and lettuce and fennel, with beetroot, hearts of artichokes, livers of fowl. And after the salad, fish: oysters brought from the coast at great speed, lampreys from Nantes, and the roe of Bordeaux shad. There were egg dishes of a dozen sorts, and cheeses mild and strong, from the delicate *fromage à la crème*, which was eaten with sugar and wild

strawberries, to the cheese of Brie; and spiced figs from Nîmes and the celebrated quince preserve of Orléans, and fruit jellies from Auvergne; and pastries that were marvels of architecture without and of gastronomy within. With these, there were such treasures from the cobwebby cellars of the palace as only a favourite of two dukes of Burgundy could produce: the wine of Beaune, praised by epicures for more than a thousand years; the choicest vintages of Chablis and Epernay; the wine of Saint-Pourçain, and the hypocras which was always offered to kings and princes on their solemn entry into a town. There were wines of Madeira which Isabella of Portugal had given Crèvecœur; and muscatel which the Emperor Frederick had sent to Charles the Bold.

Louis had no taste for music; but he liked the sort of song which alluded with gross humour to scandalous amours. Also, while he had scant patience with the kind of buffoonery purveyed by the usual court jester or fool of his day he relished "droll stories," especially when there was a sting of malice cleverly tucked away to pop out in the *dénouement*.

Tempted by spiced tid-bits of many kinds, the

diners lingered at table until midday. If Louis had any curiosity to know what the embassy from Flanders had to say to him, he concealed it perfectly.

When all were replete, he did a thing strangely (for him) defiant and insolent. He seldom antagonized a man needlessly. Loving to buy, to cajole, to trick, better than he loved to seize by overpowering, it was his habit to use every means to win men to his purposes before he thought of any other way of breaking down their opposition. But lately he had been displaying, at times, a different temper—so much so, that he had sent away from him into banishment, Philippe de Commines, because that deserter to him from Burgundy had counselled diplomacy in dealing with the Burgundians, rather than intimidation by fire and sword.

"Bring the Flemings in," Louis commanded the Lord du Lude, to whom he had promised the governorship of Flanders.

Crèvecœur was aghast, but tried to make it appear that the king could not have meant that the ambassadors were to be brought into the dining hall, among the fragments of a meal which had been eaten while they cooled their heels without.

He rose, as if he thought the king had given the signal to repair to the council room.

Louis read the mind of Crèvecœur, and the governor's consternation gave him additional delight in that which he was about to do.

"We will see them here, my lord," he said, chuckling at his insolence, and at the discomfiture of the dignitaries of Arras who were present: Jean de la Vacquerie, the Pensionary of Arras; the Bishop, the Mayor, the Abbot of St. Vaast's, and others who were of the city and of the governor's household.

Accordingly, there were brought in—not as ambassadors, who are bound to be treated as representatives of their sovereign, but as petitioners—the pensionaries (or town councillors) of Ghent and Brussels and Mons; the abbots of St. Bertin's and of St. Peter's, at Ghent; the mayor of Louvain; a lord of Brabant, one of Flanders, one of Artois, and one of Hainault; and a grey-visaged man whose eyes burned with sullen fury when they beheld the fragment-strewn tables behind which lolled the King of France and his councillors.

The Pensionary of Ghent was spokesman for the party. He was less affronted than the Duke of

Guelders and some of the others; because he knew less about the customs of courtesy.

He was a Fleming and he hated France; he was a demagogue, and he hated the autocracy of kings. Swollen with the success of the Gantois in dictating their will to the sovereign of Burgundy, he was eager, now, to parley with the king.

"We come," he declared, "from the Three Estates of Flanders and Brabant, of Hainault and Artois, to desire your majesty to appoint a day when we may meet with you to treat about our policies as neighbouring nations. And in the meantime, we desire that all warfare may cease—on both sides."

Louis sat leaning forward in his great chair of state, listening intently. The expression of his face was as guileless as that face could ever be.

"On both sides?" he repeated, inquiringly. "Is, then, our neighbour, Burgundy, warring against us?"

The sneer was so covert that the Pensionary scarce caught it. But Guelder's grey face flushed with rage, and a look hard to describe flickered in the eyes of Crèvecœur.

"It is not," the Pensionary went on, "the pur-

pose of Burgundy to make war. Enough of that has been our portion, these ten years past especially. We shall fight only to defend our own."

He was playing into Louis's hand, like a dull-o'-wit, and Guelders could have killed him.

But the game was so easy Louis scorned it.

"If you come as ambassadors to us from our cousin and god-child, the Lady of Burgundy," he said crisply, "we would thank you to present your credentials to our chamberlain."

"We come from the Estates of her provinces," the Pensionary answered. "Our princess has pledged herself to be guided by her Estates in all matters—not to levy taxes nor to make war without our sanction, and not to marry other than according to our choice."

This, Louis knew at least as well as the Pensionary.

"That was, I believe," Louis murmured, meditatively, "by letters-patent of February. It cannot be that you are unaware your princess has changed her mind?"

"It matters not," the Pensionary replied, heatedly, "of what mind the princess may now be. This is her pledge with us, signed and sworn and

sealed with the great seal of Burgundy. And she is not like—things being as they are—to tamper with the Great Privilege, as it is called."

"How long," Louis inquired, "are you away from Ghent?"

"Two days. We left there in the early morning of the day before yesterday."

"Strange!" Louis murmured, as if to himself. "Strange!"

"What is strange, your majesty?"

Louis thrust his hand into a pocket in the breast of his surcoat, and drew forth a document, to which was affixed the great seal of Burgundy.

"You must have ridden hard upon the heels of them who brought this," he said, as if puzzled. "And in this letter, the Princess of Burgundy assures us that she will have her affairs governed by four persons only—to wit, the duchess-dowager, the Lord of Ravestain, the chancellor, and the Lord of Humbercourt; and desires that we may communicate to the chancellor and Humbercourt our directions for the guidance of our beloved cousin and god-child, and for the peace of our two realms."

At this, the ambassadors broke into murmur-

ings—some angry, some incredulous, some vengeful.

Guelders held his tongue; being made wise by experience. And John of Dadizeele tried to calm the others—like the wise and good patriot that he was—lest they make a breach with France which, Heaven knew, they had no power either to defend or to heal up again.

The Pensionary of Brussels (showing such heat as puts a man at the mercy of any cool adversary, but delivered him over almost as if bound and gagged to Louis XI. of France) demanded to see the letter the king held.

Louis overlooked this person as if he had not spoken—indeed, as if he was not there—and handed the letter to Guelders.

"This seems rather," the king said, "to concern you than any of these others. Because I have been told that you aspire to our cousin's hand. So you should know the princess is pledged to our son, the Dauphin of France. You will not read this, in her letter. But such was her wish and will, brought to me by the chancellor and Humbercourt."

The taunt in Louis's smooth voice and in his

bland look made Guelders all but blind with rage. And it was not he, but Dadizeele, who noted the surprise of Louis's councillors.

Men who had known Louis during most of his life—as Tanneguy Duchâtel had, and the Lord du Lude, and the Bastard of Bourbon—were amazed in a degree beyond their power to conceal. None of them had supported Commines in his pleadings for acquisition by diplomacy rather than by conquest. None of them had felt in Louis, as had that shrewd student of statecraft, the mental change which came over him after the death of Charles the Bold.

While that intrepid warrior lived and fought toward an imperial crown, Louis seemed to realize that his hope lay in outwitting Charles, not in outfighting him. So he played the cool, calculating game against Charles's rash hotheadedness; when Charles spent fortunes in war, and in panoply, Louis spent fortunes buying over Charles's best fighters and councillors, in seducing Charles's allies; in subversions of every kind, such as only the mind of Louis XI. could conceive.

But, on the very day that Louis received news of Charles's death, he began to show a different dis-

position: to favour rash measures and swaggering enterprises. Commines felt this before any others of Louis's associates believed it possible he could be so greatly changed. This episode of Arras, however, gave profound concern to some whose fortunes were much bound with Louis's. Two years were destined to elapse before it became generally apparent that Louis had succeeded to the madness of his father and his grandfather; but the first uncanny evidences of disorder in that superlatively obedient mind were beginning to be discernible in that spring of 1477, when Louis was completing his fifty-fourth year, and the sixteenth of his reign.

Guelders took the letter from the king's hand, and read it. There could be no doubt of its genuineness.

"I thank your majesty for this consideration," he said. "There seems to be some lack of mutual understanding in Ghent, between the Lady of Burgundy and her councillors. No doubt, on our return the princess will make clear to us her purposes."

He spoke coldly; but it was evident to all how great his fury was.

Burgundy's army was routed, dispersed, leaderless. But Louis should have known that in his own, the loyalty was none too great; and that he would have done better to placate this Guelders and the others—even to buy them, if possible, so that they might help to hold for him their towns and provinces.

But the cunning which had served him so many purposes had slipped its leash and was his master, now—not his slave. It glittered in his bright blue eyes, beneath the ragged thatch of brows.

"No doubt," he answered Guelders, "no doubt, my lord duke." The corners of his cruel, sensual mouth were updrawn, unpleasantly, showing his fang-like teeth. "But, lest through inadvertence she forget, perhaps you would like to take with you her highness's letter?"

Guelders stared, incredulous. The offer was most unexpected. He had been wondering if by any means in the world he could get the letter to take back with him. When he found that Louis wanted him to have it, he began to fear that it could not be of any service to his cause. Almost he was afraid to accept it.

Then, seeing the consternation of Crèvecœur

and the Bastard of Bourbon, he knew that they had not expected this and were aghast at the king's action. But they durst not hinder him.

A silence so intense had not been in Europe for generations. It was as if not a heart beat. They were far from realizing the full momentousness of what was happening, but they knew that the King of France seemed to them as crazy as his grandsire.

And so he was. All that he had accomplished for his kingdom was not nullified but held in check—in partial development—for two hundred years, by the surrendering of that letter for which Guelders now held out his hand.

CHAPTER XVIII

A MODEL FOR ST. GEORGE

To Franz Hofer, left alone with Frederick after Mary's departure from St. Bavon's, fell a task no man would have envied him.

Frederick was despairing and determined, exuberant and morose, philosophic and foolish, in such quick succession that the older man was in nowise able to keep pace with his changing moods.

"Something," the lover bewailed, "tells me I shall never see her again."

Franz was secretly resigned, but dared not admit as much.

"Misgivings," he ventured, "sometimes arise in spleen; and a man's thoughts gall, when his bile o'erflows in jaundice."

"Am I yellow?" Frederick demanded anxiously.

"I spoke in metaphor," Franz answered. "You are cast down, and therefore fearful."

"The surcharged heart has prescience," Frederick averred. "A sluggish pulse, like yours, Franz, beats to no measure but food and drink and warmth and an inglenook for your last years. Love tunes us to the beating of the world and makes us aware of many things which are hid from you."

Franz felt that it was not the inferiority of his position, but the superiority of his knowledge, that made him forbear to smile. The arrogance of youth! The insolence of their assumption that their business is the world's affair.

"That I doubt not, my lord," he replied, humbly.

"I would," Frederick cried sharply, "there were someone in the wide world a man might talk to of his love, and not be thought a fool!"

Thus, for hours on end, ran their intercourse that day. At times Frederick, disgusted, would try to read, or call for paper and essay to write. Then, after another futile conversation, he would fall into moody silence and sit staring from the window into the base-court or beyond the gate-house roof toward the open country.

"If I could only stride a horse, or scale a peak, or do something!" he wailed, fretfully. "But to

sit here, aching in the joints like my venerable sire, who's lame, they say, from kicking doors and servants! There's all the world to overcome; and here I sit supine, while the hours drag by interminable!"

At length, the great bell of the abbey rang the hour for vespers.

"Help me," Frederick cried, suddenly resolute. "I'll attend at prayers."

Franz fetched his master's gown and surcoat (for Frederick wore, travelling, the attire of a student rather than of a knight) and helped him dress. Then, almost before the bell had ceased ringing, he offered his arm.

Frederick tried to disregard this aid; but he was too stiff and sore to indulge pride. So, leaning heavily on Hofer, he made slow progress through the speckless, shining corridors and down the stone stairs to the door of that covered passage which connected the guest-house with the south transept of the abbey minster.

The monks were in their places when he entered, and the choir was filled with them; but they were audible only, and not visible; for the stalls were screened from the view of worshippers in the nave

by an elaborate reredos which obscured the altar from all save those on a direct line with it. Their voices in the responses and chants overflowed the choir, soared among the arcades of the triforium, and rumbled down the pillared aisles, in a splendour of sound that needed no aid of sacred words to give the effect of addressing deity.

To one whose ear for harmony was so acute as Frederick's, there was an incalculable soul-balm in the rhythm and in the rising and falling cadences of those sonorous voices. The deep bass tones seemed to make the earth tremble; and now and then a tenor note caused him to close his eyes and hold a heart-beat as if he were catching a strain from some celestial choir.

The magnificence of sound was so great as almost to dim, during this service, the wealth that the minster spread before the eye.

The church antedated Gothic, and was more Norman-Romanesque than some of its coevals nearer the Rhine. The noble simplicity of its lines, the cold grey of its undecorated stone, made an enhancing setting for the wealth of superb tapestries and thirteenth-century glass which gave the church its principal colour effects. But in

addition to these, a myriad of faded, soft-hued silken banners, which had waved in battles against the infidel, hung from the arches of the triforium.

Frederick's eyes had recently been filled with the Byzantine gorgeousness of San Marco's colour and the wonders of Santa Croce with Giotto's frescoes, as with the sculptured magnificence of France's great cathedrals. But the abbey church of St. Bavon's gave him a thrill comparable with the keenest he had felt on all his travels.

As he sat joining in the responses, the low, late sunlight poured the radiance as of ten thousand sapphires, rubies, amethysts, topazes, down from the west windows of the transepts, upon the superb tombs of Crusaders; glancing from their tarnished armour which hung over their effigies, and hiding in the dusty crevices of the rich sculpture which chronicled their good deeds. In shadowy, distant places in the aisles, spots of yellow flame flickered above tall white candles, burning at those tombs where mitred prelates lay, their croziers beside them, but their shepherding laid by.

The sound, the colour, the poetry, the ecstasy of it all shone in Frederick's handsome young face until he was as if transfigured. He was so beauti-

ful to behold, so thrilling to senses that love youth and comeliness and romance, that a man who was of the worshippers could not take his eyes from this stranger; to him, all the splendour of the abbey minster was no more than an adequate setting for the picture Frederick made.

The interested observer was a man between forty and forty-five years of age, slight of stature and rather delicately modelled. His dress indicated means at least comfortable, and taste that was scholarly with a flavour of the æsthetic. He was Hans Memlinc, court painter of Burgundy, who for more than ten years had been a resident of Bruges, painting portraits and altar-pieces and earning a competence such that only 140 men in that city of wealth were taxed higher than he. Well married, well-to-do, well-thought of, he had passed his life's meridian without evidencing more ability than a score of other men then painting in Bruges. The work of the glorious Van Eycks was available for his daily study and inspiration; their pupil, Peter Cristus, had continued to paint and to teach in Bruges until Memlinc's maturity; the ardour of Flanders for eminence as a mother of artists was very great, and superb was her patron-

age. Yet withal, Hans Memlinc was coming upon late middle age, and had done nothing to the glory of Flemish art.

Deeply dissatisfied with himself, he had gone, finally, to Italy, to study the sources of that inspirational quality the Tuscans in particular were so successful in imparting to their art; and there had entered anew upon life—or so it seemed to him—in the light of those ideas whose first beams were heralding the dawn of the Renaissance.

Like most men of his day, whose spirit was such that it demanded to feel the romance of life, he had deplored the passing of the age of chivalry with all its picturesqueness and its valour and its ideals and poetry. He had felt that he was living in drear, dull times; and had marvelled, as his coffers filled and his soul seemed to grow leaner while his income waxed more fat, why Heaven never sent him anything that he could wish to paint. Then, in Florence, he began to feel the tremendous romance that was dawning for the world with the breaking down of feudalism and the sowing of individualism through various appeals to thought. The same soul qualities which had made certain men of some generations fight and die for the right to embrace

Christianity, and certain men of other generations fight and die not merely to resist the infidel but to conquer and efface him, was about to make men of generations succeeding Memlinc's fight and die for the right of conscience; some day the valour of another generation would enlist against unjust government, and then, on a later day, the world's heroes would fall fighting not in their own cause but for the wrongs of their oppressed brothers; so that always there would be great needs and brave deeds.

Philosophy was beginning to interpret history again as she had done in the Golden Age, and to make life superbly significant; religion was beginning to relate itself to mortality as well as to immortality; the cult of beauty was reviving. Altogether, it was a wonderful day to be alive in, Memlinc felt, after his sojourn in Italy, his acquaintance with men like Verrocchio and Sandro Filipepi and Gozzoli and Politiano, and that dazzling youth, Leonardo.

Filled with this new spirit, Memlinc was eagerly scanning his world for confirmation, when he came to Ghent for conference with a noble patron who desired a painting of the Blessed Virgin and Child,

with St. George and the donor. Many things inspired by that Italian sojourn were to go into this picture, although in countless points it was so closely to resemble the one painted for Sir John Donne ten years ago. And in these subtle differences, which were to be emphasized by the surface sameness, Memlinc hoped to demonstrate the change of attitude he held toward his art. Studying Uccello's work had taught him much in perspective; studying Pollaiuolo's had taught him much of anatomy and flesh colourings. But these were not the great things; for it was not in technic that he had been deficient, so much as in spirit. The men who had done most to give him his new viewpoint were Sandro Filipepi and young Leonardo. Other men were concerned, as he had been, with trying to paint what they saw; those two were bent upon understanding what they essayed to paint and expressing something which other eyes, unaided by them, could not perceive. How differently those two minds worked! One sought understanding through the sciences, and one through the mysteries; yet each was consecrate to the idea of painting the thing imagined with the mind and with the

soul rather than merely seen with the pictorial eye.

Leonardo was a youth of four-and-twenty and still studying in Verrocchio's school, although already under the patronage of Il Magnifico and doing some work for him. But his was the most stimulating mind with which Memlinc had ever come in contact. Also, the superb beauty of Leonardo, the charm and radiance of his personality, made Memlinc tingle with exquisite realization of what life may mean in its supreme incarnations.

Sandro was ten years older than Leonardo, a heavy, mortal-looking man, nowise suggesting the poet and symbolist that he was. For more than twelve years, Sandro had been out from under the direct influence of Fra Lippo Lippi, working in the *bottega* of the Pollaiuoli and in his own, yet he was just developing that concept of painting which was to differentiate him from his fellows and which he himself was able but imperfectly to realize.

Memlinc could never forget a conversation he had had with Leonardo and Sandro apropos of Sandro's Saint Sebastian painted for Lorenzo de' Medici. Conforming, almost line for line, to the accepted pattern for pictures of that popular

martyr, it was only in the expression of the beautiful young soldier's face that Sandro's Saint Sebastian was different: he was not agonized, but triumphant, as if transported beyond pain by a vision of all that his martyrdom was to mean to the faith he died for.

Leonardo had asked Sandro where he found his model and how he had induced that expression, and was dumbfounded when Sandro answered that he had used no model, and had imagined the look a brave young soldier would wear who died for a faith so glorious. For months, Sandro admitted, he had tried to think of himself as an officer in the legions of imperial Rome, young and handsome and full of the love of life which had dealt with him so generously, yet glad to defy the Emperor and die, because he deemed that God so desired him to do.

Leonardo's way would have been to seek for a model who was of the Saint Sebastian type; and to lead him, at any cost, into situations wherein he might exemplify the mien and expression of one who suffered torment for his conscience' sake.

The method of Sandro excited Memlinc's wonder; but he knew well enough the qualities of his

own mind to realize that he could not work after that manner. A man does not, at will, command such power of self-projection into the minds and spirits of other persons.

But Leonardo's efforts to paint with understanding were such as a fellow craftsman might emulate.

The Virgin of Memlinc's next picture should not be merely a placid, well-proportioned lady holding her Infant. She should be Mary to whom the Angel of the Annunciation had said: "That holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." The woman he painted, serene beneath her canopy, majestic against her honour-cloth of Venice velvet, must make beholders thrill with what she evidently felt as she held the Son of God for angels to praise and saints to worship. And Saint George, beside her, must not be merely a well-drawn figure in chain-mail, and steel corslet, but the noble young soldier who, defying Diocletian, had given his life to deal the dragon of infidelity a mortal blow.

The look in the Madonna's face he knew, now; because he had recently seen it, for the first time, in the face of his wife as she held their child in her arms.

Then, as he looked across the nave of St. Bavon's minster and saw the stalwart, knightly form of Frederick and his eager, dream-haunted face, he knew that at last a vision had been vouchsafed him and he had seen a man of the sort who can die gladly, triumphantly, for his ideal, but cannot live denying it.

That night the lamps burned late in Frederick's withdrawing-room, while he and the court painter of Burgundy sat talking of many things.

Memlinc found in the young Austrian much that had so fascinated him in Leonardo da Vinci: the same sort of extraordinary beauty; the same love of making poetry and music; the same eagerness to understand all that was going on about him in the world; the same tendency toward mysticism; the same demand for high adventure and thrilling reward. But in other things, Frederick was more like Sandro: he was less inclined to satisfy his curiosity about life by patient deduction than he was to court revelations. He was intensely interested in what Memlinc told him about Sandro and Saint Sebastian.

"If I painted," he exclaimed, "I should paint

after his manner. It is so I must study life; what I see, becomes no part of me except I feel it. What I feel, that I can comprehend."

When the painter broached that matter of Saint George, which he did with no little diffidence, Frederick was frankly delighted with the compliment of being asked to pose for the warrior saint; but explained that as soon as he was able to ride he must face homeward, urgently.

It was agreed, therefore, that Memlinc should make a study, on the morrow, of Frederick's head. If need be, he could get the armoured body posed by someone else, later on.

CHAPTER XIX

FAILURE AND PERIL

"AND what said my lord, the king?"

The Duchess of Burgundy was receiving in private audience her ambassadors to the King of France.

Both gentlemen looked haggard. They were weary and anxious. But her highness showed greater stress than they. With her there were only the Duchess Margaret, also pale and harried-looking, and the Lord of Ravestain, an elderly noble, first cousin to Charles the Bold and younger brother of the Duke of Cleves.

It was late on Friday evening when the Chancellor of Burgundy and the Lord of Humbercourt reached Ghent; but they went at once to the palace to report to their sovereign. She was waiting for them, hoping to have news of their embassy before embarking upon the vastness of another night.

"His majesty, the King of France," Hugonet replied, gravely, "sends his dear god-child and cousin assurance of his tender solicitude and affection——"

"Yes, yes—I know!" Mary broke in, impatiently. "But the letter! What said the king to that?"

"He seemed well pleased, your highness. To our minds, his majesty appeared more than a little weary. His speech touching the marriage of the dauphin and your grace was that he desired it above all things; and that when 'twas come to pass, you and his son should wear the crown of greater France, while he retired into a monastery, to serve Heaven."

Weary though they were, and depressed from the usual high level of their acuteness, both men watched Mary intensely as the chancellor delivered this message. For neither of them felt at all sure he understood her.

Her acceptance of this marriage was, in effect, like selling out all that her father had fought and died for. Either she had no sense of nationalism nor yet of filial pride and devotion, so those considerations could not weigh in the balance against

the opportunity to become Queen of France; or her helplessness had made her so terror-stricken that she could think of nothing but buying off her greediest and most formidable foe and allying her cause with his armies. Nothing that they knew of Mary supported the idea of her as covetous of more pomp and power. And yet, if terror swayed her, why did she throw herself upon the mercy of the most merciless man alive, before she had even tried to preserve Burgundy by securing it a defender from among the many who offered themselves?

Her reception of Louis's avowed intention deepened their mystification.

"Not now?" she cried, as if alarmed. "Not yet?"

Her great brown eyes were wide with horror; and the note of fear in her voice was so sharp that the Italian hound, stretched beside her, pricked his ears up alertly.

"Your highness does not wish to reign?" Hugonet asked, the blandness of his tone unroughened, though his mind was in a tumult. (If the Lady of Burgundy had changed her mind, he and Humbercourt were little better than dead men.)

The gaze of the Duchess Margaret was averted, but her expression was full of trouble. As for the Lord of Ravestain, he looked as puzzled as the chancellor and Humbercourt felt.

"Not yet," Mary faltered. "Our liege, the king, hath many more years, surely, wherewith to serve France. The dauphin is a child—almost a babe—scarce seven years. He must know little more of reigning than I do!" Her inflection was not bitter, but plaintive. "It was my hope that, while the dauphin grew toward those years when he might wed and rule, I should bide here, among mine own, learning to know their needs and how to win their confidence; then——"

The look on the faces of the three men, her councillors, froze the flow of her speech into sudden, chill silence.

"Your highness," Humbercourt began—then hesitated, not knowing how to go on. He could deal with Louis XI; but this girl with the wistful eyes and the faith of an eager child baffled him utterly.

"The expectation of his majesty, while not fully discussed with us," Hugonet said, "is undoubtedly that your highness will proceed at once to France

as the bride of the dauphin. Thereupon, the king will lead or send his armies against such parts of your domain as shall not readily agree to the union of Burgundy with France. And, when he had defended for you your realm and put down all uprisings, he will appoint to the provinces governors of tried ability, who will hold your subjects for your highness and for France. The Lord du Lude is chosen, I believe, to be Governor of Flanders. And the Lord des Cordes is to continue, by his majesty's appointment, in those offices he has held of your highness, and of the late duke."

Mary rose to her feet. Her eyes, which during the first words of the chancellor's speech had been full of bewilderment, flashed—as he proceeded—with superb anger. Her small hands were clenched till the nails cut her tender palms; and the furious beating of her heart was evident in her white throat and in her bosom. She was making a supreme effort to control herself; but a bitterness which mocked death had entered her soul as she realized how her own trustingness had led her to betrayal.

"My lord the king hath indeed misread me," she declared with a hauteur that was splendid,

majestic. "Burgundy is my inheritance, and I am not trafficking it, for any price. Repeatedly, by many messengers—secret and avowed—his majesty hath sent me assurances of his concern for my welfare, and solicitation to know how best he might conserve my interests. I was not much misled! But, knowing I had neither the army wherewith to fight nor the wit to outmatch his majesty, nor yet where to turn for a friend to lend me either, it seemed to me—as I told you all who are here present—that I could not do better for Burgundy and for myself than to put my realm and myself under his majesty's protection, looking toward a day when it might please God that I should be wife to the dauphin. His majesty cannot have thought that I would surrender Burgundy to him and to his governors!"

"The dower of a bride becomes her husband's property," Hugonet reminded her.

"But not her father-in-law's!" Mary retorted, hotly. "When I am wed, I trust it shall be my pride and sweet delight to take my husband a fair dowry. I trust my happiness in him shall be so great that all I have will seem too small to bring my heart's liege lord. But my sires signed them-

selves Dukes of Burgundy by the grace of God. I wear their crown! When I relinquish it, 'twill not be at any king's behest and on his terms solely. I am not sovereign by King Louis's grace; but by my father's and grandfather's puissance; and by God's decree. I sent you, my father's chief advisers, as my ambassadors, to treat for me with the king—not to deliver me to him, bound hand and foot, for his disposal. Has Crèvecœur transferred his allegiance, like the Prince of Orange?"

"When he saw your highness's letter, he deemed that your wish would be that he should not longer hold Arras against the king."

"It had not been taken?"

"No, madame, my liege; only the faubourgs were occupied."

Mary turned deathly pale; and Margaret exchanged agonized glances with the Lord of Ravestain.

"What more? Tell me the worst!" ordered the Lady of Burgundy.

Both men knelt before her, their grizzled, weary heads bent low upon their breasts wherein their hearts sat so heavily.

"Madame," said Humbercourt, huskily, "his

majesty has fought incessantly, for sixteen years, to hold the inheritance that came to him from his illustrious father. He knows, better than any man alive, that cities and provinces do not accept, as God's grace to them, their new rulers, if they can hope to gain advantage by revolt. Your highness has no army to enforce her claims. Therefore, when your letter signified that your wish was to be guided by us who are here present, and his majesty, counselling with us, made plain that some force, in your interest, must hold your own for you, it seemed better that Crèvecœur, say, should govern Artois and Picardy, than that they should revolt or fall into the government of men strange to your policies."

"But holds Crèvecœur his grant to do this from me, or from the King of France?" Mary demanded.

"By the treaty of Arras, he became King Louis's vassal when the Duke of Burgundy died without a male heir," Hugonet reminded. "He could not serve your highness if he stood traitor to the king; so he acknowledged his allegiance——"

With a half-smothered groan, Mary put her hands to her head as if the pain of her reflections

were intolerable, and turning her back on her kneeling courtiers, went to one of the windows. There, screened by the rich damask curtains, she stood looking down into the great courtyard of the palace, wind-swept and empty on this gusty night. Splashes of driving spring rain came against the leaded casement, and Mary laid her hot brow on the cool glass, grateful for the brief soothing. Tears brimmed her eyes and overflowed; her sweet mouth quivered. The world seemed conspiring to mock her.

In the room behind her, no one spoke, and the two ministers continued to kneel, humbly awaiting her pleasure. What deference they all showed her! And what one of them could she trust to think for a single moment of her interest apart from his own?

A cold nose rubbed her hand, sympathetically; the dog's love stood on no ceremony; her sovereignty did not hold him aloof. She patted his slim neck, affectionately; and in a few moments she returned to her chair.

Motioning her ministers to rise, she seated herself and passed her hand across her eyes with a weary little gesture as if she were brushing away the shreds of a tattered illusion.

"My lords," she said, "I knew when I sent you to Arras that I put your lives in jeopardy. But I hoped great good might come of the emprise. Also, I was not unaware that you both, if good came, were like to share it handsomely—and if this venture were not made you both were like to lose well nigh all you now have. I was not ignorant of your tenderness for France, nor yet of the French king's fondness for winning to himself the councillors of other sovereigns. I thought, when I wrote the letter I sent by you to his majesty, that in your treating with him you would favour France rather than the demands of the Flemings. But it was not in my thought that you would, in my name, hand over Burgundy to my father's foe. My fault is this: I should have made more plain to you how far I am willing to go for peace and security, and where I must stop or feel myself a traitor. I accept the failure as my own, not yours. Only God knoweth to what peril we are committed. I think my brain is all on fire. Peronne! and Arras! Hesdin! and Boulogne! I cannot save them. I am so impotent. God help us all! . . . I pray you, Go!"

She kept herself in fair composure until the three

men, withdrawing as hastily as due ceremony permitted, had left her alone with Margaret; then she turned a frightened and appealing face toward the older girl who was as piteously inadequate to this grave situation as she.

Margaret loved her husband's daughter better than she had ever loved any other creature; she thought she desired Mary's happiness more than she desired any other thing in all the world; and yet she could not rid herself of a feeling of vexation with Mary for not being able, or willing, to find her happiness in some peaceful, agreeable, compromising way that would suit a majority of her courtiers and subjects and fellow-sovereigns, and end this turmoil about her hand.

"I feared for that embassy," she said gloomily; her tone was plaintively remindful that she had urged against it and been overborne.

"I know!" Mary acknowledged. "But what other way was there? I was so hard-pressed I was desperate. If the duke, my father, were alive, and had betrothed me to Charles, the dauphin, I should expect to be sent forthwith to France, there to bide with Queen Charlotte or the Lady Anne, until the babe that I was affianced to either

reached marriageable age or died of some frail child's disorder. But I am sole sovereign of Burgundy, and needed for her government. It never seemed to me otherwise than that the king would hold my troth sufficient reason for drawing all his armies from my soil, and even for offering them to aid me against my enemies. He is an astute man. He must know that Flanders and Holland, Hainault and Brabant, cannot be seized by him, or even pledged to him without years of such diplomacy as he is reputed master of. If I were fool enough to go to France, as he proposes, and let him appoint his governors over my provinces, how many of them could he hold? Statecraft should make him to entreat me gently—so that, when his poor little dauphin comes of age to wed, I might go, taking him a larger domain than he is like ever to win or hold by his wits or by his sword."

This was sound sense; although it did not admit the reason why Mary planned so desperately for time. Margaret regarded Mary as foolishly love-struck; yet she had to concede that the girl had a better brain for reigning than her rash father had.

"What happened, think you?" she asked anxiously.

Mary shrugged her shoulders and put up her hands, palms outward, in a gesture so essentially French that it emphasized sharply for a moment the racial difference which lay between them.

"I wish I knew!" she said, "whether the king stole their reason away, or their loyalty. I only know he shall steal neither from me—unless God desert me in my extremity!"

Margaret wrung her hands.

"You do well," she cried, "to call it an extremity! I have not anything I would not give to Heaven if we had back that letter sent to Louis——or, better still, if we had been distrained from sending it. It was your madness brought us all unto this pass! A stolen visit to a church thronged with the very people from whose vulgar fury Gruuthuuse sought to keep you safe—and thenceforth your reason is gone, and you commit yourself and me and three noble lords, to peril even of death——"

She sank down, sobbing, her arms outstretched upon the table and her head laid on them.

Mary stood erect beside her. The room was very still; the palace was still; the driving rain had ceased, and the world was dark and still.

They two, girls—both of them—seemed alone in a tense and terrifying solitude, in a vast and chill darkness, peopled with all the shapes of Fear.

CHAPTER XX

"OUT OF THE EAST"

WHEN Margaret had returned, with her sleepy waiting women to her own apartments, Mary submitted herself to her attendants to be made ready for bed. She was silent and distrait; and taking their cue from her mood, as court service had taught them, they did not break in upon her reflections.

The Lady Halewyn was in waiting, that night, and she was Mary's favourite. But, although she was scarce accustomed to the change in Mary's state, and wont still to think of her as the sweet, blithe little daughter with no cares beyond untoward weather on a day when she desired to hunt, she felt in the Lady of Burgundy tonight an aloofness, an isolation, which years of familiarity could not bridge. And well she knew how grave were the things the little duchess had to think about.

"Is it your highness's wish that I sleep in your chamber, or in the adjoining room?" she asked, when Mary was ready for bed.

"In the adjoining room," Mary replied; and there was in her voice a tone of effort to speak casually, to keep her own counsel, and to be an appreciative if not a communicative mistress, which made Jeanne de Halewyn very sad. It marked—that tone!—the girl's acceptance of sovereignty, with all that it implies of distrust and weariness.

Left alone at last, Mary gave herself unrestrainedly to the luxury of self-pity. These long days through, she dared not think of anything which might make her realize how lone and defenceless a girl she was. In the presence of all those prying, spying courtiers who surrounded her from morning till night, she had to keep reminding herself of her sovereignty, and assuring herself that of course she could maintain it—yes, and marry whom she chose! But, under cover of the night's soft wing, she dared to be the girl she really was—now exultant because she had found her love; now despairing lest some fate wrest him from her; now full of faith that a miracle would make their

union possible; now full of doubt and anguish. She durst review, in these vigils, the piteousness of her situation—and weep about it.

In all the world, only one heart that loved her not for what she had but for what she was—and of the comfort of that love she was not permitted to avail herself! Then her thoughts went winging across the slumbering city to St. Bavon's Abbey. Was he there? Or had he started on his journey home? (She smiled tenderly at the thought of him pleading with his father for permission to marry a Flemish maid who could not join her lands with his to broaden his possessions.) In the three days since she parted from him, no word had passed between them. Mary had not been able to think of any one she dared to trust with a message; and prudent consideration for his safety, even more than her own, made her forbear from making another excursion to the abbey.

Since the departure, on Monday night, of her ambassadors to the King at Arras, the spying upon her and upon Margaret had been more sedulous than ever. Margaret's visit to the abbey was known at court, and throughout Ghent—it seemed—and Mary's presence with her might

be suspected, for all either of them knew to the contrary.

Frederick was certainly being watched, and he might even now be in durance. For the Abbot of St. Bavon's was, Mary knew, playing a shrewd game, in which his effort was not openly to defy the crown, but secretly to abet Guelders and the Gantois toward the founding of a Netherlands kingdom.

The hour of departure for Arras, on Tuesday, of the Guelders deputation to wait upon King Louis, was made known to the two duchesses on their return from the abbey. And though they could not discover if the absence of the chancellor and Lord Humbercourt was regarded with suspicion, they could not help being aware of the intensification of surveillance about themselves.

In outward calm and inward sickness of fear, the long days passed. On Wednesday, the lord chamberlain of Margaret's household had reprimanded a lady-in-waiting to Duchess Margaret and a lady-in-waiting to Duchess Mary, whom he caught whispering together.

"It ill becomes members of the court, at a time of national peril like the present," he said, "to

indulge in any manner of secrecy which may invite suspicion."

This one word was sufficient to the court-wise. Thereafter, all communications were studiously open and aboveboard.

Court affairs went on, apparently, as usual; but no one remarked even how grateful were the early days of spring, without wondering whether this loud and general pleasantry might not be interpreted as a signal to French sympathizers that King Louis was advancing, or an intimation to Flemish sympathizers that the emperor was going to aid them against the king.

Mary thought she had definitely abandoned every idea of seeing her love again before his return. She had been trusting to her secret embassy to establish with Louis a long truce which would appease the Flemings and secure for her time in which to perfect some plan of action. And in that hope she had reconciled herself to prudence for the present.

But now, as she lay abed, very wide awake, reviewing the situation she dared not discuss with any one, she could not summon any faith or any philosophy to calm her wild fears.

The Guelders deputation would doubtless be back in Ghent tomorrow night. What had happened there at Arras, where the leering, fleering Louis had her letter and could so easily betray her? Ay, and would, too, if it suited his purpose to do so! She tried to reason that he was little likely to play against her and with the Netherlands. But she was not reassured.

From side to side in her big, curtained, four-poster bed, Mary tossed, every nerve in her body taut to the twanging fingers of apprehension; her heart beating so furiously that she struggled against a feeling of suffocation. The linen sheets, rumpled by her restlessness, gave her no comfort. The satin-damask hangings of her bed seemed like the walls of a prison-house.

Maddened, her brain on fire, she jumped out of bed and went to a window where, instead of drawing aside the heavy curtains, she crept behind them into the deep embrasure, and stood looking out into the night.

The rain had washed the heavens clean; and great argosies of clouds were scudding eastward, under a stiff breeze, toward the gold of tomorrow's sun. In the crystalline clear spaces be-

tween the full-sailed celestial galleons, the milky way was like phosphorescence about their cleaving keels; and here and there a strong star-ray burned earthward like a far ship's lantern.

Troubled though she was, Mary could not resist their appeal to her sense of poesy.

"Where are you going, my great white ships?" she said within herself, stretching up her arms to them appealingly. "Halt! Can you not? For a little white *voyageur*—and again at St. Bavon's Abbey, for a beautiful knight with hair as gold as his heart! Let us sail away, and away, and away, to the edge of the world where the sun comes up and the rainbow stops, and the fruits grow ripe in enchanted gardens! 'Let us never come back to this hateful place, where Love goes in shackles, and Hate wears a crown, and no one is good—just worldly-wise!"

Her eyes filled, as the clouds sped unhalting by.

"Oh, Lady of Burgundy!" she wept, silently "What stars conjoined to mock you, at your birth?"

This thought of horoscopes brought to her mind a recent arrival at her court, an astrologer who had found favour with King Edward of

England and by him been commended to his sister, Margaret.

Even in an age when few admitted skepticism of astrology and almost everyone sought its aid to cure sickness as well as to foretell the success or failure of every venture, the English king and his sister of Burgundy were noted for their devotion to its practices. When Edward was in exile at the Burgundian court and Lancaster was briefly restored in England, Edward was told by Lord Gruuthuuse of an astrologer, then in Venice, who read in the heavens how Edward should return, rout the White Rose forever, and wed his brother, Gloucester, with the widow of Lancaster's heir. When these things had come to pass, Edward invited that astrologer to Windsor and there had managed to keep him for seven years. But the call of the East grew irresistibly strong, in this son of the Euphrates; and he was journeying back to the land where civilization had written its first epoch in the glories of Babylon, as the Chaldeans read the stars.

Margaret's welcome of him had been fervent in the depths of her distressed heart, but tempered in its expression because she saw that Ezroum

was regarded with distrust by the anti-English party at court. There was no ground for suspicion that she favoured either of the two English alliances urged on Mary. Nevertheless, Margaret knew that she could not be too discreet about consulting Ezroum—who was of no mind to tarry where prognostications were fraught with so much peril.

Mary's horoscope had been cast the very hour of her birth and read many times by divers savants of the stars. But the readings irritated her with their vagueness. Her state of mind toward astrology was not one of disbelief so much as of waiting for conviction of its efficacy. Margaret could stand here, looking up at the stars, and feel sure that her destiny was writ there, if only she could read it. Mary, looking up at them, wondered if the scroll of the firmament did indeed contain that which she was to do—or if Heaven expected her to write it. It was, however, not curiosity to know what the stars said of her that prompted her to send for Ezroum. It was a sudden inspiration; but she lost no time in deciding to act on it.

Jeanne de Halewyn was so sound asleep that

Mary had to shake her, gently, to wake her; she thought, at first, she must be dreaming; this eager, excited girl who was laughingly urging, "Wake up, Watch-dog!" could not be the sober young sovereign of an hour ago.

"What is it?" Jeanne murmured, sitting up and rubbing her eyes, dazedly.

Mary stepped to the ewer, dipped a towel end in cool water, and handed it to her lady-in-waiting.

"I need you," she answered. "Nothing is wrong—but I desire your attendance."

Jeanne held the wet towel to her face, and in a moment was fully back from the otherwhere of sleep and dreams. She thrust her bare feet into her night slippers, and drew on her dressing-gown.

"I have been wakeful," Mary explained, "thinking on many things. The stars tonight are wonderful; and I am minded to call that star-gazer, Ezroum, who came hither day before yesterday and is lodged in the palace."

"Does your highness mean that you wish to call him now?" Jeanne asked, trying not to show all the amazement she felt.

"Yes—at once!"

Mary was seldom imperious; but she knew how to suggest, without having to say it, that she was the sovereign Lady of Burgundy.

"Does your highness wish him summoned—secretly?"

"Not at all—save that we will not stir all the household needlessly. Wake whichever of my dames you think would be most loath to miss attending"—this was as directly as Mary ever alluded to the espionage all about her or admitted her awareness of it; but Jeanne's quick ear caught the bitter inflection. "And wait yourself upon the Duchess Margaret, entreating her to come to me, if possible."

Ezroum prided himself on his difference from other men who essayed to read the stars. It was their method to surround themselves with everything that might contribute to an air of occultism and mystery; it was his method to declare that understanding of the stars was not a science but a divination, and that shepherds watching their flocks on the lee side of the wind-swept hills were more like to read God's writing in the sky than were fusty philosophers in turret chambers hung with

zodiacal insignia. He accepted the hospitality of kings without yielding to the luxury of palaces. His diet was almost primitively simple; his dress was nondescript, but such as a man would wear whose life was spent afoot in the outdoor world. Mentally and spiritually the man was curiously compounded. He thought himself a "natural" man, uncorrupted by the influences which muddled the thought and purposes of other men and clouded their vision of truth eternal. In reality, he was a product of a dozen different sophisms of his day, from the sporadic revival of Greek pantheism to the first efforts of science to struggle free from charlatan mummery. And like most zealots, he understood himself less even than he understood other men, but was swayed—as he swayed others—through his intuitions. He was a fakir—with much of the Eastern wonder-worker in him—but he believed in himself, absolutely. The money that was paid to him, he gave to the poor. No superstition he had was stronger than the one that if he had coin in his purse or more than a pilgrim's fare in his scrip, the stars would not tell their secrets to him.

Jeanne de Halewyn had to rouse the secretary

of Margaret's lord chamberlain, to learn where Ezroum was lodged.

"The Princess Mary," she told this man, "has seen a strange portent in the sky, and desires the attendance of the astrologer from the East."

By the time Ezroum was presented at the door of the princess's private *cabinet du travail*, the Duchess Margaret was there with two of her ladies, and the assemblage further included three of the women of Mary's household, besides Jeanne de Halewyn.

The astrologer was a man of medium height, and lean, sinewy build. His skin was brown; he was smooth-shaven, and his velvety black eyes were marvellously gentle and dreamy in expression. His nose was sharply aquiline, his cheek-bones high, his mouth ascetic, his hair grizzled with grey. He was dressed as in daytime, because he slept in his clothes, and wore a sort of smock of brown fustian, not unlike a Franciscan friar's robe, and a brown cape or mantle.

The women were all in dressing-gowns, voluminous and enveloping. Ezroum saluted with grave courtesy the Lady of Burgundy and Duchess Mar-

garet, speaking French as liquid and colourful as that of Provence.

So much attention was focussed on him that there was not much to spare for Mary. But if there had been, she was ready for it. Her *robe du chambre* was not the splendid one of white Genoa velvet edged with miniver, which lay close to her bed, but a simple thing of finest, softest white woollen cloth, hanging in long, straight folds from the shoulders. The "angel" sleeves, which swept the floor, were edged with swansdown; other trimming there was none. A more girlish, appealing figure it were hard to imagine. The effect on Ezroum was all that Mary had hoped for.

"It cannot," she began, addressing him, "be needful for me to tell you aught of my anxieties; if you have not heard them from the lips of men, you have read them, doubtless, in the stars."

Ezroum nodded.

"I never saw my mighty father dead," Mary went on. "I never had the privilege to lay my cheek, all hot with bitter tears, against his brow chill with the iciness of death, and call him to come back to me. They tell me his dauntless spirit went from his body, leaving it stark and piteous

outside the walls of Nancy. I cannot believe that he is dead. Night after night I dream that he has come again, in all his might and splendidness, and lifted from my shoulders these burdens that are bowing them. I go to bed. I toss with sad anxiety. At last, I sleep. And then he comes! Always the portent is the same: I dream that I am looking east by south—toward Nancy—and there, over the place they say his corpse is, a star shines like the great diamond he used to wear, and lost at Granson. Presently, he steps toward me in the star's radiance; his armour, burnished silver; his fine, Damascus blade unsheathed; his face alight with love 'roused by my extremity. I try to cry my welcome to him—wake—and am alone.

"How do you read the stars? Where is my father's spirit—in Heaven, or here; struggling to get to me past prison bars?"

Ezroum bowed his head on his breast.

"Princess," he murmured, "Duke Charles of Burgundy is with the hosts of Heaven."

Mary turned away, toward a window that looked east and south. Pushing back the heavy curtain, she pointed toward the sky. Her flowing sleeve, falling away from her white and

lovely arm, gave her pose a classic and commanding beauty.

"Look!" she cried. "Tonight I could not sleep. I stood in the embrasure of a window in my room—no light behind me, only the lights celestial shining in the world outside. Great galleons of white clouds went drifting by. And suddenly, there my star shone, full in my upturned face as in my dreams. And there was a deep sense of comfort that I had as I gazed. My cares of state dropped from me as it were a tender hand loosed the clasp of a too-heavy mantle. What says yon star to me that I am too distraught to understand?"

"It says," Ezroum made answer, "that out of the south by east, deliverance will come to you, a sword unsheathed for Burgundy."

"Like Elsa of Brabant, I shall have aid heaven-sent?"

"Like Elsa, yes, your highness."

"How shall I know him when he comes? What sign will he give me?"

"No sign, mayhap; your heart must tell you. That is what hearts are for; and they beat truly for those who listen to them with the ear of faith.

But in palaces lurk many poisons which clog ears against truth and destroy hearing. Spend hours in that embrasure, questioning your star. You are well on your way to knowledge, now that you know how it is seeking you."

"My thanks," said Mary, fervently. "You have despoiled my mystery of fear and given me a friendly star to look to for my guidance and Burgundy's well being."

She dismissed them all, and withdrew to her bedroom. The look in all their faces amused her greatly—so sure was she that she could guess what application each one made of Ezroum's prophecy. But it was the look in Margaret's face that satisfied her with her endeavour.

CHAPTER XXI

LOVE FINDS A MESSENGER

"GREAT talk, indeed," Memlinc echoed—abstracted, for a moment, by the sole consideration of a line. When he had achieved it, to his delight, he gave his thought again with zest to the conversation he was pursuing with Frederick, touching the matters men discussed in Florence.

"The like of it," Frederick went on, "has not been between men, in my belief, since the days of the old schools of philosophy. I envy you, with all my heart, that you are able to express your debt to it—as you are doing now. Mine goes unrecorded—"

"There is life," the painter reminded; but his tone was not without the complacence of one who has a definite and regarded outlet for his concepts.

"But life resists our efforts to make it an art!" Frederick cried. "We are so bound, forbidden,

threatened. How can any man call that an art wherein he may choose neither the time nor the manner of his beginning nor of his leaving off? What artistry has he who cannot choose his backgrounds, nor name his subjects, nor even spread the colours of his fancy at his will?"

The painter smiled, indulgently; it was a rare, sweet smile of a man who had made infinite compromises, without feeling conquered.

"Looks art so free to you?" he asked, sketching rapidly to catch that something in Frederick's handsome young face which bespoke the idealist straining at his leash. "This that I do now is a fair example. 'Paint me,' says some man, with a wish either to propitiate the saints or to patronize the arts, 'paint me an altar-piece for Our Lady's altar. Let the canopy, whereunder Our Lady sits, be in a pillared portico, as in the triptych done for Sir John Donne; her feet upon this Oriental carpet brought by one of my ships in recent voyage from the Bosphorus; behind her, for an honour-cloth, this strip of rich brocade—velvet embossing upon cloth of gold—presented to me by the Doge of Venice, for services rendered him. One angel will suffice; I like the lute for angels, better than the

harp or violin. My portrait, in the right foreground, at Our Lady's feet. Behind me, my patron saint, George; the dragon dying beside him. In the background, I desire some of my ships that ply the seas 'twixt Flanders and the Golden Horn; also a picture of my ancestral castle. And would there still be room for a walled garden, with irises and lilies? I have a fancy for the way Fra Giovanni of Fiesole painted flower-starred grass.' Thus, friend, do my franchises come. Thus, in effect, all artists are left free to work their wills. Sandro, in Florence, rages against this; and Leonardo, glorious in his beauty, stands in the frequented squares preaching ideals of art, calling the Florentines to demand this and that—so liberating their artists. They seem to listen, I but think they comprehend nothing so much as that he is a wondrous sight to look upon, with his head, god-like, crowned in living gold, and his fair skin reflecting the soft rose-colour of his cloak. More hope lies, I think, in Lorenzo than in the populace. Howbeit, there is freedom even in painting Blessed Virgins upon faldstools, Divine Infants pointing to the Sacred Word, and kneeling donors filling the foreground. I hope to show it, in this that I

do. And if I live, I know I shall see that splendid malcontent, young Leonardo, paint Virgins in a fashion all his own—and Sandro, too."

Listening intently, Frederick held unconsciously his pose.

"You think the revival of classical learning will not affect art?"

"Indirectly, yes—and that, greatly," Memlinc replied. "The study of classic sculptures cannot result otherwise. But directly, no—not appreciably. Men will never again believe in Apollo and Venus as they once did; and they do not create living beauty out of dead myths—beauty of line, they may perhaps; beauty of colour, also. But in general, the creation of beauty is an act of faith. If it be otherwise, my concept is at fault."

He was not dogmatic; he stated his credo fervently but not polemically—as he had stated it in those ardent conversations in Florence.

"Why," Frederick pursued, "did chivalry, think you, pass without finding more expression in art? Is it too late for art to make amends?"

Memlinc shook his head, doubtfully.

"That I know not," he answered. "Chivalry's faith and its ideals must always, as things seem to

me, live in some fashion in the hearts of men. Succeeding ages may express them differently, as they have different needs. The old ways will not return—they never do! But there must be a special valour for this age, as for times gone. There must always be knights. St. George was one and slew the dragon that was in his way. Your dragon is another sort—you will slay him as valiantly."

The talk ran thus, on general themes, for two days, while Memlinc sketched and painted his Saint George. He evinced not the slightest curiosity about the worldly affairs of his model; all that appertained to Frederick beyond the abbey walls was of no consequence to Memlinc; but for the unexpressed yearnings of the young man's soul, the artist had a curiosity so impersonal, so legitimate, that Frederick found himself responding to it eagerly. He poured forth the passion of his heart: the uncongenial pattern of his circumstance; the changeling strangeness of his feeling 'neath his father's roof; the fervour of his own high purposes; the futile business urged upon him by greybeards with gold-dust, not star-dust, in their eyes; finally, his love.

Much that he said, the older man knew for the eternal plaint of youth; but there was else about it of uncommon ideality. Life clips the wings of all, he knew; and eyes that, straining, gaze at the sun too long, grow blind at noon-day, while the night should be far off. But each generation seems to set free one or two spirits that soar upward like the lark at dawn, drawing earth-holden eyes and thoughts to heaven. Young Leonardo had appeared such to the middle-aging Netherlander; and this Frederick spoke like another.

"Love, as you tell of it, is not the gift of God to many men," the painter said. "I never knew it; nor was I ever haunted with the dream of finding her who is the one and only complement of my immortal soul. My dreams were all of other sort. And when I could support a wife, I chose a careful home-maker, to bear and rear my children and to compass me about with comforts. I have never wished my mating had been otherwise. Most men are liker me than thee, I think, in that matter. But there are also men who find their vision adequate to all their needs, although they never see the shadow that a lily casts, nor note lines that thrill like heavenly music, nor group objects with

the picture-maker's eye, nor challenge nature for new harmonies of colouring. To me, those men are blind—as, to musicians, I am deaf, and to you I am unacquaint with love.

"I do believe that some are singled out and qualified to see more than their fellows, some to hear more, and some to know more of the mys teries—like Love. And as I hold myself bound to see beauty and to give a good account of it, so I should, were I in your case, feel bounden to render great service for great love."

By stages unprecipitate, Frederick led their talk to the Burgundian court.

"The Lady of Burgundy," he said, "you must have painted many times?"

"Not so! I have not even seen her many times. In Christendom is no woman, I surmise, set about with so much ceremony. In her father's lifetime, she counted for nothing more than a pawn; but, being his only one, he kept her carefully. I doubt if he had ever once for the most fleeting moment thought of the possibility of what is happening now. He was so young and strong, so confident, so bursting with the pride of life and power, that I am sure he never believed otherwise than that a son of

his would grow up beside him and inherit all his glory. The Duchess Mary I have not the honour to know, but she has my unstinted sympathy."

"The King of France, report says, hath seized her duchy of Burgundy and is conquering Artois."

Memlinc was not curious, but he was cautious.

"So I have heard," he responded, guardedly.

Nor had he any opinion that he was willing to declare, as to whether her highness would wed with the dauphin, with the Duke of Guelders, or with the emperor's son.

"Her grace will undoubtedly do what seems best for her inheritance," he said. "And has given her word, in the Great Privilege, that she will neither wed nor make war nor raise taxes without the consent of her Estates."

No more could be got from him; a painter must live by favour of those in power, and when no one can guess which way power is like to lie, there is but one safe course—and Memlinc adhered to it.

"The duke's widow," Frederick pursued, as if idly chattering, "doth not press the suit of her brother, Clarence?"

"I have not heard."

Frederick threw back his head and laughed

heartily. Memlinc did him the honour not to pretend surprise.

"I understand!" the wayfarer said. "All courts are whispering galleries and the way through them to iron cages, traitors' blocks, and such-like, is short for too many. I hate their horrid atmosphere. You carry enough of it about you, clinging like prison-reek in your garments' folds, to poison the air between you and me. Doubtless I am set down in your mind now as a spying secret agent of some greedy government; whereas, my worst offence is that I have a tender interest in a lady of Dame Margaret's court—and thought you might know her."

The painter smiled.

"The Lady Margaret has a great household," he said. "She brought a splendid retinue from England when she came here a bride, nine years ago; and some who then accompanied her are still in her service—besides many noble dames and demoiselles of Burgundy. I may have seen them all; some of their names I know. How is your lady called?"

"The Lady Mary. She is a little tall, but slender, and snow-white. She has brown hair, a

small nose, a little head and face; her eyes brown, tinged with grey or gold, beautiful and clear. I have scant knowledge of her, having met her few times, in strange places, only by act of Providence. She knows even less of me. Our only assurance is that we were made, each for the other, in the womb of Time. All else than this we hope to discover in due course."

Memlinc had seen less than any artist should of the supreme, the transfiguring emotions. Often and in bitterness he had thought that men knew too few of them in his day. But here was an embodiment of feeling so strong, so beautiful, so divine, that one who witnessed it could never again fail to remember, vividly, how a man looked whom the lambent flames of Heaven's fire had made luminous in a dull world.

Nothing that had ever come to him seemed so full of inspirational quality as this young Saint George whose dragon, the painter surmised, would be hard indeed to kill. Who the lady was, interested Memlinc far less than did the effect she had on her lover. So, while he painted furiously, he answered somewhat abstractedly.

"I do not know," he murmured vaguely while

making vigorous brush strokes. What did it matter who she was, if she could make a man look thus for love of her?

"I must be on my way," Frederick continued. "Another marriage is urged upon her—with a man she loathes. I must make haste about my business and return to fetch her. We parted, three days since, and dared not hope to meet again because I could not get away from here and she could not come hither. I feel, now, able to ride tomorrow —a little way, at least—perhaps to Alost—if all goes well, to Brussels. I have far to go. There has been comfort, these days past, in making my condition serve you, and in our talk. And the knowledge that she was not far off has soothed me tenderly. Now that the leagues must widen between us every day for weeks on end, my yearning to see her is like one great ache filling my body, my whole life, to the exclusion of all else. My squire went to the palace with a note from me, and could not get it to the hands of any one he dared to trust. He says both duchesses are in effect prisoners, and the members of their households are watched jealously—by orders of the Gantois. Could you not, as court painter, get a communi-

cation from me to my lady's hand, and one from hers to mine?"

"I have not been at court since these troubles grew so intense," the artist replied. "My home, as you have heard, is in Bruges, so I am not of these Gantois in any sense. If they know aught, though, of me, they know I am no meddler in affairs like this. I may be able to serve you, and I may not. But I will gladly try."

CHAPTER XXII

"A YOUNG KNIGHT OF GREAT BEAUTY"

THE wing of the palace occupied by Duchess Margaret was the same where she had held her regent's court in Duke Charles's absences and kept her consort's state on those few occasions when he was in Ghent. Mary clung to her old quarters, altering them little, and augmenting them when need arose by the state apartments of her late father. She avoided the acceptance of sovereign panoply in every particular wherein her choice prevailed; seeming to feel that by so doing she held her father's throne ready for his return.

Memlinc, on that Saturday afternoon when he had put by his brushes and gone to the Cour du Prince, was easily admitted through the main gateway which did not seem to him to be more watchfully guarded than usual. He refrained from stating his errand as with Dame Margaret,

and, asking only for the chamberlain of her household, was directed, without questioning, to the *salle d'attente* where many persons who had, or thought they had, business with that functionary or with his mistress, sat awaiting his convenience.

In the group of which Memlinc presently became one, there were a bishop and an astrologer; a goldsmith from Florence, eager to show a superb reliquary; a master-weaver of tapestry from Brussels, there to receive orders for new hangings to commemorate, on the walls of Margaret's palace at Malines, the glorious exploits of the late duke; a lord of Furnes, hopeful of getting his widowed daughter appointed to the household of her grace; the Pensionary of Arnhem, on some legal errand touching young Charles of Egmont, son and heir of Adolph of Guelders, who with his sister was under Margaret's guardianship; and a Carthusian monk who, en route from the Grande Chartreuse to the abbey of the order in Ghent, had stopped in Nancy and brought from the tomb of Charles a small memento which he had leave of his abbot to offer the royal widow.

There seemed to be no more difficulty about

getting before the duchess than was usual in Memlinc's experience of that most ceremonious court. His turn came, in due course, and he was presented by the chamberlain.

The Lady Margaret looked very sad, he thought, and anxious. But she greeted him kindly, as her wont was. The request he made to her chamberlain for opportunity to see her was that her grace's servant, the painter, Memlinc, temporarily of St. Bavon's Abbey, sought certain directions for the royal order he was executing. He had trusted to the mention of St. Bavon's to convey some hint of his probable errand. It did. But, instantly he was in the presence of Margaret, he was most subtly made aware that every word of conversation passing between the duchess and any other person was being listened to for evidence against her or against those she favoured. There was in all the sycophantic group around her not a visible indication of suspicion and spying; but, palpably, the place was full of it. The atmosphere of a court is noisome, at best. But when a change in power impends, the air is suffocating to every good and decent impulse that may ever have lodged thereabouts.

"Touching the picture ordered by his grace, the late duke, our sovereign Lord of Burgundy," Memlinc began, when he had received permission to state his business, "I have the honour to submit a plan of composition."

Margaret knew of no picture such as Memlinc described; but she thought she knew why he had come. She listened attentively while the artist told of a suppositious altar-piece for St. Walburga's church in Oudenaarde.

"Here," he said sketching rapidly with a sharpened bit of charcoal on a piece of paper brought to him by Margaret's orders, "Our Lady would sit on a faldstool—no canopy over her, no honour-cloth behind, no Oriental carpet beneath her feet; back of her, kine and an ass; at her feet, the three kings—this one, on the right, to whom the Divine Infant points, a portrait of the late duke, in armour and wearing the collar and mantle of the Golden Fleece; here, kneeling behind the duke, a young knight of great beauty——"

Memlinc's voice droned soporifically, as he sketched. The afternoon was a drowsy one, of extreme heat for the beginning of May. A big, bluebottle fly, tired of buzzing futilely against a

window-pane, made a sudden sortie into the room and lighted on the nose of Margaret's pet hound which had been amusing the idlest in her court by snoring. With an annoyed but lazy yawp, the sluggish surfeited animal snapped at his tormentor —ineffectually; and the bored onlookers laughed as disproportionately to the cause as children do in school.

Taking brief advantage of the distraction, Memlinc—who had sketched an unmistakable likeness of Frederick for the "young knight of great beauty" —contrived to murmur so that no ear but Margaret's heard:

"The knight at St. Bavon's craves one sight more of the Lady Mary before taking his homeward way tomorrow."

Margaret glanced about her to reckon what chance she was taking, and then said, without lowering her tone: "A more finished sketch of Duke Charles's portrait could be shown us, could it not, ere you begin to paint? Bring such an one hither tomorrow, or send it, about noon. Our chamberlain shall have instruction to admit your messenger."

She summoned her chamberlain and showed

him Memlinc's sketch. This officer, the Lord of Genlis, had been long in the service of the Burgundian court and might have been deemed loyal—but he was not, and Margaret felt it intuitively. (He was even then a well-paid servant of King Louis.)

"Tomorrow, about noon," the duchess said, "Herr Memlinc will send us, for our further consideration, a more carefully drawn study for the late duke's portrait. See it to that his servant is brought to us with the drawing."

Mary had not overestimated the effect on Margaret of the Ezroum incident; but though Margaret was made thereby more amenable to Mary's pleadings that they try to effect some communication with Frederick, the problem of how to do it without bringing trouble upon him was not solved.

Privacy, always the most difficult of all privileges for royalty to come by, was practically, these last few days, impossible to the two duchesses; their opportunities for intimate talk were reduced to none.

Mary did not have to feign indisposition, on the morning after her interview with her ambassadors

and the subsequent summoning of Ezroum; but she might not, except for her desire to keep away from her swarming, spying court, have made so much as she did of her severe headache.

She lay in her big bed, under the canopy of rose brocade; and the heavy curtains at the windows kept out every ray of the brilliant May sunshine. The air of the room was heavy and stale; and Mary, relaxed from the tension of last night, was limp and drawn-looking as she lay with her big eyes closed and the puckers of pain and perplexity in her white brow.

Dozens of plans for reaching Frederick passed through her mind, and were rejected through fear of bringing suspicion upon him. Tears filled her eyes and rolled down her cheeks, as she realized the cruel difficulties of her position.

Freda was crooning over her in a distressed tenderness—good old Freda, who had been her slave for twenty years! She could trust Freda's loyalty, but not her intelligence. And if the poor soul were caught by those who guessed her allegiance, she would never know how to extricate herself. Mary would not run the risk of sacrificing her. Jeanne de Halewyn was there; and Mary

could not remember a day when Jeanne had not been devoted to her. But Jeanne was under suspicion of the Flemings, because she was cousin to Philippe de Commines; and Mary knew that Jeanne was closely watched by those who hated France. Also, Mary thought that the Lady Halewyn, while probably not in King Louis's service, leaned strongly toward the French alliance.

Any word that came for her now in Margaret's care would surely be given her—Mary felt—after what Ezroum had said. But how to reach St. Bavon's with a message for him, she could not think.

Margaret, learning of Mary's indisposition, came to see her. Jeanne de Halewyn reported that the princess was weeping inconsolably, and had begged piteously to be let alone.

"She has had too much strain, of late," Margaret declared. "Let me go to her."

Laying herself beside Mary on the bed, she gathered the girl's head to her bosom and held her close enfolded.

"Dearest," she whispered, "what ails thee? Tell me—tell Margaret! Is it something new and special—or the same that I know?"

Mary clung to her.

"I want my father!" she sobbed. "I want him to take back this woful crown. It is like the torture! All its inner rim is spiked with sharp iron, and the points are being driven into my brain—slowly, as hands of them that hate me turn the tightening screw. I am too young to be thus treated! I never have harmed any one. I want my father—he knew how to make these who torture me to quail and quake!"

Margaret wept with her. Charles had not been a considerate nor a tender husband, but he had been true to her—which was a supreme compliment in those days—and he had exacted from everyone the deepest respect for her. He had given her a great deal that made her content; and if he had also demanded a great deal, he had been—on the whole—not a hard master to serve, and there was much in him that was warmly lovable. She, too, wanted him back.

"I have hoped for his return, and prayed for it, and almost believed in it," she whispered, close to Mary's ear. "But each day my faith grows more faint with its watching and waiting. And now the seer, Ezroum, says our great duke is with the

immortals. The star that shines for you and for poor Burgundy bodes another deliverer. Does your heart tell you that the knight at St. Bavon's may be he?"

"It does," Mary answered, speaking with all earnestness albeit in a low tone. "I know not who he may be, and I care not. I only know that of all who clamour for my hand there is no one of them that loves Burgundy, the splendid duchy that my father fought and died for. Each one of them would make her, if he could, something to suit his own purpose, but other than what she is. I would that another and not I—a stronger and a better than I am!—had succeeded my great father. But since such is not the case, and since I am not able to do that which I yearn to do for Burgundy, why should not God raise up and send here a knight to love me and my land, and fight for us and all that we hold dear? And what could be likelier than that he should come, as has my knight, unclaimed, unheralded, unknown—not even knowing me more than I him—so that our faith and love may have no touch of the greed, the self-seeking, the readiness for barter, wherewith all is tainted in the world of which Love is not

King? I tell thee, Margaret, I knew it in the Chapel of the Precious Blood—there, in the presence of the holy relic—when I prayed God for deliverance from my sorrows, and looked up straightway into the blue eyes of my knight! I am not of those who say that chivalry is dead. I believe in it—and it has come to aid me. But God knows what duress my dear knight is in, here in my capital. And I cannot think how to get word of him without bringing him in danger."

Margaret promised that she, too, would think on every means until one came to her mind that seemed feasible. And with that, she took her leave. But she had made no plans, nor had she seen Mary again, when Memlinc came.

After he left, she announced that she would attend to no more business that day, and sent one of her gentleman to say that she would sup in the apartments of the princess.

Mary had been busy with state affairs since eleven o'clock. She was sitting in her *cabinet du travail*, when Margaret entered, her head laid wearily against the high back of her chair, her eyes closed, and her face pathetically white and drawn.

Margaret bent and kissed her, with a pretty commingling of tenderness and deference.

"My head is aching miserably," Mary said, "and it seems to me that for æons on end I have been listening to talk about revenues and appointments and diplomacy and defence of the realm."

There were full twoscore persons present, and of them all none ventured speech of any sort; they stood around as seemingly awed by Mary's mood and by their uncertainty of what effects it might have, as they had been aforetime by the temerarious Charles's ebullitions.

Opening her eyes suddenly, Mary looked them over—the sycophants, playing each his or her own game but all afraid to declare what it was, lest their avowal preclude jumping to the lucky side if their cause lost.

She smiled a wan and bitter smile, and closed her eyes again.

"I had a strange vision, then," she said, in a feeble, far-away voice. "I seemed to wake, as from a trance, and see each one of you wearing the insignia of king or emperor or duke, but none the emblem of Burgundy."

Each murmured some sort of protest, measured

with care so that it might sound adequate but not too much.

Margaret concealed her scorn, and hastened to restore the normal tone.

"Pain conjures up strange fantasies," she observed—as if dismissing the matter therewith—and smiled benignly on them all. In her heart, though, she wondered greatly whether Mary had indeed seen in a vision what she had described, or whether she had defiantly spoken her belief.

At supper, there was marked constraint. The princess spoke little, and etiquette imposed her mood on all.

Margaret made several efforts to interest her highness, without success. At last, with the patient air of offering a final attempt, she said:

"The painter, Memlinc, waited on me this afternoon, regarding a picture ordered by my lord, your father. Memlinc is at St. Bavon's—" she would not have dared this had she been less sure that Mary could keep command of herself—"and sketched for me the portrait of Duke Charles as he purposes to paint it, kneeling before Our Lady, and behind him a young and splendid knight. I have commanded a more finished drawing of the

duke to be sent here to us for our scrutiny tomorrow, before Memlinc returns to Bruges."

"I shall be pleased to see it," Mary murmured.

She made no further comment, nor dared to appear more than slightly interested. But her heart beat tumultuously as if she had seen her knight or received a letter straight from his hand.

When Margaret took her leave, she whispered:

"Courage! I believe all is well."

Mary smiled at her hopefully, through tears that were not of pain.

CHAPTER XXIII

"YOUR GAME IS UP"

SUPPER, in those days, was at four; and the evening, for most folks, ended soon after candlelighting time. Even at court, the day was a matter of daylight; and they who had risen at dawn were ready for bed at dusk—especially at a time of year when dawn was early and the long, northern dusk gave place reluctantly to a short night.

By nine o'clock that Saturday evening, the palace was quiet. Here and there a chamberlain or secretary was burning oil to make a long day longer; in the guard-room some of the men-at-arms not on sentry duty were drinking and story-telling or throwing dice or playing cards, in the rush-light; but in the main, the day was done, when a man cloaked like a traveller rode over the lowered drawbridge and pulled up demandingly at the portcullis.

"The Duke of Guelders waits upon her highness," he announced, boldly, "and asks to see her at once on urgent business."

His tone was without plea or apology.

The porter at once admitted his grace and his grace's sole attendant, and sent a guardsman to escort them with a torch across the court to the main entrance of the wing wherein was the household of the princess.

Mary had retired an hour ago, but was not in bed when the duke's request was brought to her.

The mere sound of Guelders' name was enough, always, to make Mary sick with loathing; and to-night, in her weariness and desperate anxiety, it came to her with the effect of a blow which nauseates. She reeled under the physical shock of it; then with supreme effort commanded herself and ordered the duke shown into her private audience room.

"Summon my lord chamberlain," she commanded, "that his grace may be suitably received. He is, indeed, my aunt's husband; but his coming to my court must be attended with due dignity."

She directed the Lady de Chaulnes, who was in attendance upon her that night, to fetch for her

a ceremonious robe of white and silver brocade, edged with embroidery of pearls, and for her head a hennin with flowing white veil.

Thus arrayed, she entered the audience room and took her stand before her canopied chair of state, four dames-in-waiting with her, ere giving her chamberlain the signal to present Guelders.

Duke Adolph smiled his ghost of a smile, sinister and sneering. He understood perfectly what she was trying to do, and it gave him sardonic amusement. Let her parade her state! He had that in his pocket which would humble the proud demoiselle.

"Madame," he said, "I crave indulgence of your highness for my appearance; but I am only within this hour returned from Arras."

He bowed low before her as he spoke, but raised his head in time to look full in her face as he said "Arras."

Mary was splendid; not the quiver of a lash betrayed her agony of fear and aversion.

Guelders, who had despised Catherine of Bourbon because she could only quail before his brutality, had a thrill of sudden desire to mate with this defiant young thing before him. All the

savage exultation of rape might be possible in overcoming this girl. Revenge and greed suddenly became less in him than the other primal passion, lust.

And it was not her beauty that inflamed this in him; it was the inciting vigour of her resistance.

"Your grace," she said, "brings, I trust, good news from his majesty, my godfather, King Louis, and from our frontiers."

There was a tremor in her voice, but her manner was superb. Guelders could not conceal his taste for it. She could feel his smacking relish, and it seemed to her that she could have stood unchained in the licking flames of the ordeal by fire, more easily than she stood unflinching from the expression in his eyes and about his mouth.

"The king," he answered, sparing her nothing of his devouring glance, "was in great spirits—as well he might be, in the circumstances."

It did not occur to him that she would dare do otherwise than evade his challenge. He could have gasped when she said, in a cool sweet tone of constrained courtesy:

"Was, then, his majesty so happily circumstanced?"

Guelders was angry at himself because he could not make out whether the girl was a fool or was taking him for one. He looked at her attendants.

"I have words for your highness's ears alone," he declared.

"The Lady of Burgundy," she answered, "being young and unwed, does not give private audience."

She was as demure as a novice; yet Guelders knew there was irony in her mind if not in her manner; for that was the identical reply of his supporters, the Flemings, when refusing the known envoys of other powers permission to confer privately with the princess.

His face reddened with anger, and his hawk eyes flashed.

"Send them a dozen paces off, and let them gape," he sneered. "Call in the army of Burgundy to keep guard with them, if you will. But listen to me before you throw your perfumed gauntlet in my face—for I, *too*, have been to Arras on an embassy."

Mary knew what he meant her to understand by that; and it seemed to her that her heart stood still, stopped with her great fear. For a moment

she thought she could not sustain her rôle as sovereign—that she must turn and flee, to hide her terror from this man. She was physically sick with horror of him—of what he threatened her with as a woman and as a princess. She closed her eyes for an instant; and the Lady de Chaulnes, thinking her highness was going to fall, stepped quickly to her side. Mary smiled gratefully at her but accepted no aid.

"Attend me at a distance beyond hearing," she directed; and seated herself in the chair of state. "His grace of Guelders has a report to make us."

His suit, and the nature of it, was well known to all the court, and the repugnance of her highness was more than guessed. But the prospects of his success seemed so strongly backed that few were omitting any show of deference which might serve or save them later, if this man's iron hand held the sceptre.

The Lady de Chaulnes and the Lady de Happlaincourt and the two other dames that were in waiting with them withdrew to the far end of the room, and the lord chamberlain with his aids also.

Thereupon, Mary signed to Guelders, and he

bent one knee upon the step of her dais and thus addressed her:

"I will," he said, raising his eyes to her face and watching it mercilessly, "waste words, or otherwise, according as your highness wills. You know a part, at least, of what I have to say. If you like to pretend that you do not, I will humour your fancy—and say it all. If you prefer brevity——"

"I do," she answered, her blood boiling with furious resentment of his insulting manner.

He bowed.

"We have at least one taste in common," he said, smiling. "We may even discover others. What I have to say is this: the errand of the chancellor and Humbercourt to Arras is known to those councillors of Flanders, Hainault, and Brabant who went with me. Their wrath against your highness is very great. In plain words, your game is up. Your immediate acceptance of my hand, my sword, and my embrace, will be publicly forced on you at the Council, Monday. It is not wholly out of consideration for you that I urge you to forestall humiliation by accepting me now; I have a sort of pride that ill-stomachs the repute

of needing a lot of bone-head burghers to aid me in overcoming an unwilling bride. The bride's unwillingness rather whets my appetite than otherwise. But I want no aid in conquest. I would liefer snatch you to my saddle and ride off with you—but these fat fools must make me king. So, come! Pay up the reckoning of your losses and smile as you pay—if not at me, then at the rest of the world. You cannot withstand it. The only effort left you to make is to wear the yoke as if it did not gall. That is woman's business, first and last, I take it—wench or sovereign. If there is fight left in you fight it out with me. I like it!"

A thousand thoughts flashed through Mary's brain as she listened to him. Had Louis betrayed her? And, if so, how far? Or had Guelders happened upon knowledge of the chancellor's embassy? Did the other councillors know? Or was Guelders trying to frighten her? What possible object could King Louis have in betraying her to the Flemings at the very moment when he had every reason to believe that she had sold out Burgundy to France? She did not believe he had told Guelders anything. She placed her confidence not

in Louis's honour—for she knew he had none—but wholly in his astuteness and expediency.

Compromise with Guelders never occurred to her; but she debated within herself, as he talked, the manner and degree of her defiance.

"I suppose," she said, slowly and coldly, when he had finished, "that the sovereign of Burgundy is permitted to send her chancellor on an errand of state?"

Guelders also was cool. He looked at her long and understandingly, and the sneer which slightly expressed itself in the briefly altered lines of his cruel mouth was his acceptance of her battle gauge.

"The right of any sovereign," he answered her, "is just what he can enforce. And the right of Burgundy's sovereign, now, is——!"

He broke off significantly and shrugged his shoulders.

"The ink on the Great Privilege," he went on, "is scarce dry. Therewith the sovereign of Burgundy subscribed not to make war, levy taxes, nor contract marriage, without the consent of her Estates——"

"I have done none of those," she retorted

quickly—then hated herself for having deigned to a defence.

"She also," Guelders continued, "took oath that natives of Flanders, Brabant, Hainault, and Holland, alone, should hold high offices——"

He waited; but Mary made no reply.

". . . and if she had secret business with her arch-enemy, the King of France, some Netherlander might, surely, have carried it out; and not two Frenchmen fattened on Burgundy's spoils. Sovereigns, your highness, when they have not the power to enforce their wills, often make good shift with what is known as policy—" his tone was insulting in an exultant way, as if he knew that the battle between them was won and she could never resent anything he chose to do to her —"and your policy lies with your pledged word. This that you do is your self-destruction—as your father's campaign against the Swiss was his. I give you one more chance to save your dignity——"

She rose, and signalled to her chamberlain and to her ladies.

"The Duke of Guelders has concluded his business," she said. "Attend, mesdames!"

Guelders was only half angry; anticipation of his revenge balanced chagrin at his defeat. He bowed himself from his sovereign's presence so smilingly that he might almost have been guessed to be an accepted suitor.

As for the princess, her manner was non-committal. She did not discuss the duke, nor comment on his business, nor remark whether she felt better or less well than when he came.

"This silver brocade becomes me singularly well, I think," her principal observation to her ladies was, as they assisted at her retiring. Beyond that, her talk was chiefly to her hound, Vite.

When they were gone, she hopped out of bed with most unroyal girlishness, and slipped into the heavily curtained embrasure of the window whence she could watch her star.

"Come quickly, my deliverer," she prayed, her tears falling fast, while Vite rubbed his head against her hand.

CHAPTER XXIV

"THE BIRDS ARE VERY PROUD AND FREE"

WITH many royal personages, the maintenance of zoölogical gardens within their palace enclosures may have been a mere concession to that important part of sovereignty, display; but with Mary of Burgundy the love of animals was a ruling passion. Her horses, her dogs, her falcons, were dearer to her than any but a very few persons; and the collection of wild animals which her grandfather and father had made in accordance with a custom common among great rulers of their time had been, since she was a baby, one of her chief delights; so that, of all the royal servitors, none knew the little Lady of Burgundy in a friendlier way than the keepers of her strange and familiar animals.

Her stables and kennels were the most lavishly stocked in Europe. She was a superb horsewoman and a huntress like Diana's self. It was one of the

major distresses of her state that hunting was deemed inadvisable during this period of uncertainty. If, during these days of stressful anxiety, she could have mounted her favourite hunter, and got out into the fields and woods with all the excitement of the chase and all the sweet balm of the outdoor world, she could have given infinitely better thought to her sore problems. But the confinement within palace walls irked her almost unbearably.

The one solace left her was the zoölogical gardens, and there she spent much of the time she could command after affairs of state had been served.

The gardens were open to the public on Sundays, from noon till four o'clock; and from her tiniest childhood Mary had delighted in seeing other children view the animals. If they knew the little princess was present, they inclined to stare at her more than at the beasts; so it was a rule among the keepers and grooms that they were to give no sign indicating her. She was never permitted in the gardens without escort from her household; but the orders were that she and her group were to pass unsaluted and apparently unobserved. This mov-

ing among unrestricted little folk on their weekly junket had been one of the pleasantest things about Ghent to Mary, on her infrequent residences there.

Memories of those occasions came to her as she taxed her ingenuity to devise how she might see Memlinc's messenger. A score of plans that she thought out had to be abandoned. For herself, Mary was not afraid of risk—she was the daughter of Charles the Bold; but she was fearful for Frederick. Moreover, the penalties of failure would almost certainly be tragic. She was growing desperate over the improbability of having a word with him without disclosure of her rank, when she recalled the one place where it might be possible.

The next thing was to plan how she could be in the gardens without attendance. This accomplished, she went to bed and to sleep—and did not even dream of Guelders, but only of the knight in shining armour who was coming to deliver her.

At Mass in the royal chapel, on Sunday morning, she managed to tell Margaret, very briefly, what she purposed doing. And during at least some of the time when Margaret should have been intent

on her devotions, she was watching Mary and marvelling at what the girl was doing for love, and what love was doing for her.

They dined together, with a great attendance of lords, ladies, prelates, and other dignitaries. The dinner was served on tables made of boards on trestles (as the custom then was), temporarily set up in one of the great halls of the palace, and removed after the meal. It was ceremonious to the last degree, and to Mary it seemed interminable. She felt that she could hate them, every one—these gourmands who ate and drank so avidly, as if there were nothing better in life to do on a glorious Sunday in early May than gorge their stomachs which had been too much gorged for years at Burgundy's expense.

She ate little. Her mind was busy with her plans and with the chances of their miscarriage.

When she was able to get away without seeming to make an effort for release, she retired to her private apartments and directed Freda to fetch her a simple dress of white wool and a close headdress to replace her high hennin and long veil.

"I am going with the Lady de Halewyn and the

Lady de Chaulnes, into the gardens to see the animals," she told the chamberlain on duty.

"Does your highness wish the gates kept closed to the public?" he asked.

"No; let them come. I used to love, when I was a child, to see them enjoy the gardens. They will not know me. I want air, and space to walk, and time for reflection. Send no one to me."

It was high noon when they passed out into the dazzling sunlight and the clean, clear air; and Mary had scarce crossed the palace threshold before her step grew buoyant, answering the quicker pulse that beat in her veins, and her cheeks flushed pink, her eyes flashed bright. Her ladies, who knew how the recent confinement had irked her, rejoiced with her.

The way to the gardens from the residence lay through a long alley bordered with clipped hedges of yew.

Mary looked longingly toward the gate at the far end—then at her ladies; and laughed.

"My haste is great!" she cried, gathering up her skirt, and running fleetly.

The dames of honour had eaten heartily, and

moreover they were years older than the princess; so they made no attempt to overtake her.

She waited for them, panting a little but merry as a child at play; and as they approached her both women thought how young she was for her heavy cares, and how girlishly pretty as she stood against the green arch of the hedge gateway. Contrasting this picture of her with the one she had recently made in the great Gothic hall hung with priceless tapestries and cloth of gold, they could not help feeling how much more her element this gold of nature's sunlight, this green of growing backgrounds, seemed than did the other.

"If her highness were set free, like a bird from a cage, to seek her place and kindred in the wide world, whither would she fly, I wonder?" Jeanne de Halewyn mused, aloud.

The Lady de Chaulnes was worldly-wise.

"Back to the cage, mayhap," she ventured, "as many birds do."

Jeanne de Halewyn shrugged.

"Mayhap," she granted; "the habits of captivity can grow strong, I know. She has never known other. Freedom might terrify her. Who knows? When she was little, she had a passion

for liberating birds from cages. I think she has it yet—but now she knows that for some of them it means only hunger and want and a cruel death. I'll warrant that even now she is bound first for the aviary, and most like for a strange feathered creature that is called auk or penguin. A sailor brought this ugly bird from the Orkneys. It moped and pined, and made her heart ache. So she gave orders that a mate be sought to keep it company in this strange captivity."

Jeanne's surmise was correct; the netted enclosure on the edge of a small pond, which was the penguin's dwelling, was the princess's first objective.

There, in the corner, huddled as forlorn as any human in an oubliette, sat the grotesquely ugly bird, drooping its fin-like wings.

"Her mate has not come yet?" Mary inquired of the old man whose special charge the birds were.

He remembered not to salute except as to any lady; but his keen little old blue eyes beamed affectionate recognition.

"Madame, he came; but she killed him. He was not the one."

Mary was aghast.

"One other penguin in all Burgundy—all Europe!—and she could not make shift to bear his company?"

The old man, Jodocus, looked at his muddy shoon, then at the dames of honour, then at his shoon again.

"The birds," he explained, confusedly, "are not like us, madame. They are very proud, and free; God made them so. This tragedy is due to my perversity. When I put the newcomer in this cage, the mistress made protest. They quarrelled. But I thought, as you, they would forget their differences, each being so far from all kindred fowl. I left him here to woo her. When I returned, he lay here, dead—his head bit off—he was not the one for her."

"No," Mary murmured, "the birds are not like us—they are very proud and free; God made them so."

She made no other comment, and moved on. But in her heart she knew what she would do if Guelders were forced on her.

The aviary gardens were exceeding pleasant. Up and down their shaded, flower-bordered paths, brilliant-plumaged birds sat upon perches or

strutted on the ground. Scores of osier cages hung in the low branches of the trees, and from them linnets and thrushes, larks and nightingales and finches poured an exultant threnody. By the edges of small pools, water-fowl stood on their stilt-like legs; and on the bare, bleached limbs of a dead tree two scornful eagles sate.

But the populace of Ghent, on Sunday pleasure bent, preferred the cages of the lions and leopards, the slinky grey wolves and sniffy little red foxes, the monkeys, the camels, the dancing bears. Few wandered among the birds; even the fish-ponds were more popular.

Mary thought she knew the moment his foot trod the garden; it seemed to her that ere she caught her first glimpse of him, her heart told her he was near.

When she saw him, she said to the Lady de-Chaulnes:

"Fetch me, I pray, something from my apartment. In the chest at my bed's foot, you will find —I think—a small box of sandalwood carved as by fairy fingers, and polychrome. In it are letters I would have you see—here, in this privacy."

Both dames were rather more surprised than

even their court training helped them to conceal; but the manner of her highness was so casual that it disarmed suspicion. Not once did her glance stray in the direction where Frederick stood looking at the disdainful eagles; and she seemed as unprepared for it as Jeanne de Halewyn when a page from the court of Duchess Margaret appeared, commanding the attendance of the Lady de Halewyn there immediately.

"Go," Mary said. "The Lady de Chaulnes will return at once—I shall not need you—go!"

How long the seconds seemed till she was out of sight!

Then Mary, almost as swiftly as a swallow darts, was at the eagles' roost.

"Dear my lord!" she cried.

He turned; and all he would have said, but could not, shone in his mist-filled eyes.

"Where can we go?" he whispered when he at last could speak.

"Into the heart of the maze," she answered, leading the way.

The labyrinth of the Cour du Prince, like the collection of animals, was a memorial of that passion for display which had characterized Duke

Philip the Good. He could not hear of any royal extravagance without attempting the same thing on a more superb scale in Burgundy. A titular vassal of both the German Emperor and the King of France, it was his life-long effort to make both monarchs feel insignificant beside him; and either his own taste or that he commanded, aided by his apparently boundless wealth, enabled him to crown this effort with indisputable success. Further, his sagacity in displaying magnificence was such that, like many another unbenevolent and extravagant ruler, he got himself called "the Good" because he knew how to make his subjects feel that they were sharers in his splendours for which they the more willingly paid the bills. He had no more difficult subjects than the rich, arrogant Gantois—and none who poured more taxes into his coffers. Therefore, when he set out to gather the greatest collection of wild and strange animals that Europe had ever seen, he shrewdly located them in Ghent, and admitted the public, weekly, to view them. The maze, or labyrinth, which served the gallantry of Philip's amorous court, had for years delighted the sportive citizenry on Sunday afternoons and festal occasions; but

latterly, owing to the strained relations which always existed between Duke Charles and the people of Ghent, it had not been deemed safe to admit any one to the labyrinth. The entrance, from the bird garden, was kept locked. Mary had the key. It did not seem that any one was looking as she spoke to Frederick. Nevertheless, she took no chance.

"I will go first," she said. "Come after me—not too deliberately!—and when thou art within, lock the gate after thee."

When he had done as she commanded, and stood by her in the path bordered by clipped yew that grew much higher than his fair head, he dropped upon one knee and did reverence, lifting the hem of her white robe to kiss.

"Now take my hand in thine," she directed, "as the lovers do who wander, proud and free as birds, in the spring lanes."

Delightedly she slipped into his grasp that little hand of hers which no one ever presumed to touch save in those court obeisances whose insincerity she loathed with all her fresh, undisciplined young ardour.

"This that you lead me through is the great

wilderness," she said. "Soon we shall come to that blessed isle we sigh for. There, for a brief while—if God grants—we shall be out of the world that irks us, and in a world that we can make, each for the other, with our love and our dreams."

The key to the centre was to turn always to the right; and in coming out, one regained the entrance by making turns only to the left. But there was another exit, which few knew. Three turns to the left, after leaving the centre, one who then turned to the right and kept turning so at each angle would debouch upon a postern on the river bank; this gate was in the east wall of the palace enclosure, and opened upon a tree-bordered quai which was used by the populace as a promenade, when the rulers so pleased, or closed at either end by the posting of men-at-arms.

As they proceeded through "the wilderness," Mary made these things plain to Frederick, and gave him the key to the postern.

"Franz, my squire, is to be at the Porte de Bruxelles, ready to begin our long journey home, at four o'clock," he said. "We ride to Alost tonight. And grateful to God shall I be if we escape

unhindered from this place of guile and suspicion. The like of it my mind never conceived."

"Has someone suspected thee?" she questioned fearfully.

"Rather ask if there is someone who has not," he answered with resentment. "And what my anguish is to ride off and leave thee here, only God understandeth. Your princess hath my sympathy. But that prince hath none of it who weds with her. I would liefer thrust my face into a hornets' nest!"

Mary's eyes filled with tears.

"He might love her," she protested, "and be glad to endure for her."

"He might," Frederick assented. "But also, if he loved her, he might rather they both were dead than that they should have to live out their lives here in this noxious place, ordered about by tyrannous burghers. Much as thou art to me, I think I could scarcely command myself to pass all my days here, far from the mountains and their grand solitudes. Wait, little caged bird! Wait till I have got thee free, to be with me in the Alps of Tirol! You have never breathed pure air, my Sweet! nor brought back your gaze from a blue heaven to an earth as blue—forget-me-nots spread

o'er hillsides till one thinks the June pastures of heaven have dropped down to earth. You never have seen valleys of rock painted by God in rose and russet hues, in umber and orange, and on their far, far peaks the snow——"

"I have seen the Vosges," she declared; "and, from far off, the Jura. The Valley of the Meuse has, indeed, no painted rocks; but where the Ardennes rise, sheer and green, from the river's very edge into the blue sky, there is beauty more than any soul can hold."

"Perhaps," he granted. "But not like the Alps! Wait till our way lies, not through a labyrinth of yew, but high up steep mountain paths, in air that makes the heart beat quick and glad; past torrents rushing from the snows above; over gorges which only eagles and the mountain folk and we can span. Wait till we lay ourselves, all warmly wrapped, some summer night beneath the sky, and watch the constellations bend down to us as if glad to have our company. Wait till we rise upon a day just born, and plunge into the freshness of a world that seems new from God's hand—made for us to live and love in——"

As he talked, their narrow paths between the

hedges did indeed hem them in, almost like prison walls; and all the furtiveness, the scheming and suspicion of the court weighed like monstrous chains.

They planned what they would do when they had cast off these chains and the prison had yielded to his valiant battering.

"I shall come riding in, through the breach that I have made," he said; "and snatch you to my saddle-bow, and gallop off with you; and we will never come here any more. But where we dwell, I shall write poems for you and sing you sweet songs, and we will ride, and hunt. You shall have dogs and horses as your heart desires. And when your wish is so, we will go to Italy, and walk together where Messer Dante loved and sang; and Petrarch wooed Laura; and Giotto painted; and Donatello gave to earth again the glory that Greece knew."

Mary listened wistfully, her face so hidden on his breast that he could not see how little light of expectation was on it.

Her eyes were closed in a vain effort to keep back the tears; for it had come to her in this talk, how hopelessly caged she was and how cruel to him it

would be to snare him into like captivity. What could she offer him, with all her wealth and all her love, to compensate him for the loss of those mountains where he roamed so free? What price would any one accept for liberty?

The sun-dial in the maze's centre warned them that their time was flying fast. As they felt the hour for their parting drawing near, neither of them was able to say much; they could only cling each to the other in supreme longing that could not express itself in words. Neither of them tried to assure the other. They both knew that, as for themselves, the chrism had touched them and made their souls one for all eternity; but they both mistrusted fate, which cannot order love nor destroy it, but can balk it of happiness.

When he was gone, out by the postern that gave upon the quai, Mary sat for some moments very still, too numb with despairing anguish to weep. Her unseeing gaze was concentrated upon a lizard which lay on a warm spot of the stone sun-dial, watching her so that if she moved he might make haste to disappear.

Presently she rose, the lizard darted away; and

with that strange, blighted, sightless seeing, she groped her way out of the labyrinth—walking as one long-blind, whose guidance is through other senses than sight. The things she was seeing with her inner vision were so engrossing that the physical world about her was sending no images into her mind.

The bird gardens were closed to the public when she re-entered them; even the attendants were in at supper. The long, shady alleys knew no footfall but her own and the pattering step of an occasional peacock or pheasant dragging his gorgeous plumage across her path.

Where the caged birds hung, the Princess of Burgundy moved from cage to cage, fastening back their doors with threads of grass.

"Fly free, little birds," she sobbed, chokingly. "Fly free and mate proudly, as God made you to do."

Then she went back into her palace.

CHAPTER XXV

A PRINCESS AT BAY

MUCH business was waiting upon her. No one dared to ask where she had been, but the manner of everyone, from the servants up to her ministers, seemed to expect an explanation of her absence. She may not have been aware of this, as usually she would have been. At any rate, she ignored it.

The Duke of Cleves was come to Ghent. He was first cousin to Charles the Bold, vassal of Burgundy, and enjoyed a pension from his liege of six thousand Rhine florins—which he had come to collect. Also, he had brought with him his son John, a youth of nineteen, whom he was urging as a husband for Mary, partly because he wanted to get young John settled upon someone who could pay his enormous debts and make reparation here and there for his licentious excesses;

and partly because he was vengefully opposed to the ambitions of his nephew, Guelders.

Another kinsman who had presented himself at the Cour du Prince, while Mary was in the gardens, was the Bishop of Liége, related to her in the same degree as the Duke of Cleves, through another of the sisters of Philip the Good, and also as brother to Mary's mother. This Louis of Bourbon, a precious scamp who had to be summarily clothed with bishop's orders so that he might be appointed to the ecclesiastical principality of Liége, was in Ghent on several errands. One of them was to wheedle his niece into remitting payment of 30,000 florins he owed her. Another was to persuade her that his prime minister, that Wild Boar of the Ardennes who had led the revolt of the Liégeois against Duke Charles and Bishop Louis, nine years ago, was now ready to lead another, or—on payment of 15,000 florins—not to lead it.

Mary paid the bribe, remitted the loan, signed the order for the Duke of Cleves's pension, listened to his pleas for his son and against Guelders, endured the coarse counsel of the Bishop—even forced herself to hear William de la Marck, the

Wild Boar, tell her, in effect, how loyal those florins of hers had made him.

Her mind seemed abundantly acute for all these things—and yet never once, for so much as a moment, was her inner vision withdrawn from the familiar road to Alost.

The Estates were called for meeting at noon on Monday, to hear the report of their embassy to Arras.

Mary had not been able to confer with Margaret about Guelders's insinuations and demands; nor to give her any account of what happened in the gardens after the duchess-dowager had managed to direct thither Memlinc's messenger. But Margaret knew that Mary was downcast and anxious.

It did not occur to her that Louis might have betrayed the Lady of Burgundy and her four advisers; she knew his interests lay wholly in using and not abusing them. She did, however, fear that he had dealt scant courtesy to the Flemings; and she was prepared for an exhibition of resentment, an anti-French demonstration from them.

Mary was very white and weary-looking; she ate little or nothing at dinner, and replied in a

distant way to the meaningless gallantries of Cleves and his chinless son, and florid Louis of Bourbon.

"She has no fight in her today," Margaret reflected; "God grant she may not have great need of it!"

But it pleased God not so to grant.

The faces of Hugonet and Humbercourt, Mary studied with some interest; though without deriving any reassurance therefrom. They had not been told that their errand to Arras was known, but they surmised as much from the increased unfriendliness with which the Netherlanders treated them.

Only a dull-wit could have failed to feel the antagonism in the bearing of the assembling deputies. The loyalty which Mary had dramatically excited just a week ago was evanished quite.

She knew the moment she entered the great hall, that she was confronting an assemblage which had been skilfully arrayed against her; and she thought she did not care. That physical and mental exhaustion, which depressed all her hopes, she misread for a resignation of spirit. She believed

that some prescience told her she should never see Frederick again; and that her supineness about Burgundy's welfare was because she realized how nearly through with the struggle she was. Whether Guelders would be forced on her and she would kill him, or Louis would make her captive, or what would befall, she was not even curious. She felt sure that she was near the end of a road that fate would not permit her to retrace and that ended at a sheer plunge into some abyss. And her mood was that she would gladly have sped her horse to the brink.

. . . The Pensionary of Ghent was speaking. She had not heard him begin. She did not know how long he had been talking, nor what he had said. She was sitting, seemingly attentive, in her chair of state, and all around her were the members of her court, watching her with a terrible intentness—what time her mind had been travelling a rough road that ended on the edge of an abyss. . . .

"And thereto," he was now saying, "his majesty replied that it was evident we did not know how the princess had changed her mind and, repudiating the Great Privilege, had sent to him her chancel-

lor and the Lord of Humbercourt, to pledge her highness in marriage to the dauphin——"

The loud murmuring at this sounded to Mary like the roar of wild beasts. She tried not to see the faces of Margaret and of the three ministers implicated.

She saw Louis de Gruuthuuse step forward from among those attending her, and hold up his hand, entreating to be heard.

"The King of France makes sorry jests, at times," he began. "This surely is such. Your highness, tell us it is not so!"

Mary rose to her feet, still in a daze of unreality. But before she could speak, John of Dadizeele was imploring her:

"Your pardon, princess! And yours, my Lord of Gruuthuuse. This is a matter of privy council, and not of this parliament. We cannot allow our sovereign to defend herself to us, her subjects. It is not meet. We know his majesty suffered some misapprehension——"

"Nay! We do not!" several hoarse voices cried.

"Ask Hugonet!" others yelled.

"Look at the face of Humbercourt! It tells!"

"Guelders! What said the king?"

Disorder broke over the assembly like a boisterous, scattering wave.

Mary was faintly conscious of one feeling, and one only: how little she cared. Her mind could not seem to leap the abyss, nor even to plumb its depths; but that did not distress her. The sensation of plunging endlessly did not appal. Her attitude toward that end of the road was one of relief that it was so near; but she was too weary to be glad.

"Down with the traitors!"

"Death to the tools of Louis!"

"Sold! Flemings! We are sold like a bale of wool!"

"Your highness!" Gruuthuuse called to her above the tempest. "Speak!"

Mary heard him as a person drowning may hear a rescuer's shout and be too spent to heed it.

Then, while the tumult raged, suddenly some lightning flash showed her that she was not alone at the brink; some crash of the thunder roaring about her had in it the cries of those who galloped with her toward the abyss. She seemed to feel the horror of Margaret and old Ravestain and the

chancellor and Humbercourt as they pressed with her to destruction. She seemed to hear the anguished, pleading tones of the Lady de Hugonet, who worshipped her husband; and of Humbercourt's motherless daughter.

They were going down with her! Burgundy was going down with her! All that her royal sires had upbuilded was going down with her! She was carrying them to destruction, making not a single effort to halt them ere they plunged!

She flung upward her arms in a gesture of command so supreme that quiet came almost too suddenly, with the effect of a shock.

"His majesty, the king," she said, in a loud, clear voice that rang militantly, "was mistaken! Burgundy is NOT sold! The dauphin is NOT affianced to me, and never will be! My ministers waited upon the king in the interests of peace."

Again there was that about her which was not earthly. Her pale, earnest beauty made her seem drained of dross. The silvery shining whiteness of her apparel clothed her in a radiance which, though it had been mere panoply to them a moment ago, began, under the spell of that which was now aroused in her, to appear celestial. Immemorially

her forefathers had been rulers of men. Their blood flowed in her veins. At moments when she became acutely conscious of it, she flamed with the spirit of irresistible leadership. If she could have cared enough about it to sustain that mood, she might have swept all Burgundy, singing and shouting, to any victory she desired.

Old John of Dadizeele, sage in the wisdom of assemblies, snatched a Burgundian banner from a bearer, and waved it ecstatically above his thinly-thatched white head.

Louis de Gruuthuuse gave the trumpeters signal for a salvo. They blared. A hundred banners waved. Two hundred voices yelled:

"The Lady of Burgundy! Burgundy forever!"

The din was terrific. The surging motion of flags and flashing swords had all its world-old potency to stampede reason and sway the emotions.

Men who, less than five minutes ago, had been screaming, "Death to the traitors!" were now yelling, "Long live our duchess!" All but those who had been at Arras! Of them, none cheered with Dadizeele. They knew his argument for

the stand he took; and some of them inclined more than a little that way—secretly; but none of them dared to stand with him. The inscrutable grey face of Guelders held them in check.

No attempt was made to cut short the demonstration. But when it had spent itself, the Pensionary of Ghent asked for recognition, received it, and thrusting his hand into his bosom, drew forth a document to which was appended the great seal of Burgundy.

"Fearing that we could scarcely hope to be credited," he said, "we obtained from his majesty the letter in which her highness advises him she will take counsel only with the duchess-dowager, with the Lord of Ravestain, with the chancellor, and with Humbercourt. By the two latter gentlemen, who secretly carried the letter, his majesty was told that the princess desires marriage with the dauphin. And by use of this letter, the Lord of Crèvecœur was persuaded to renounce his allegiance and surrender Arras and all Artois—also, to lead the French armies against Hesdin and Boulogne!"

"Show it!" a hundred voices screamed.

The Pensionary answered that any deputy or

councillor might look at the letter; but that he would not trust it out of his own hand.

Accordingly, they crowded around him frenziedly, until so many had satisfied themselves of its genuineness, no one could longer cherish doubt.

Mary was still standing near the edge of the dais. Gathered around her were Gruuthuuse and Dadizeele and Cleves, and the Bishop of Liége, all questioning her, all counselling her—and all to different purpose.

A number of deputies started toward the chancellor and Humbercourt, threateningly.

"An end to treachery!"

Fearing a riot, a dozen gentlemen-in-waiting stood close to their young sovereign and to the duchess-dowager; and the Constable of Burgundy signalled to the men-at-arms present, to be ready for defence of the royal persons. They started to form between Mary and the main body of the councillors; but she waved them back, and her ministers with them.

"When the Duchess of Burgundy," she cried with a ringing voice, "has to be protected from her subjects, she will be glad rather to meet death at their hands! When you desire my life, you

shall have it for the seeking; it is not so sweet to me that I could relish it if you wished me dead. I wrote that letter, not to betray you, but to save you, and myself with you. The behaviour of my cousin and godfather, the King of France, fills me with amazement and with indignation beyond my power to speak. I repudiate, absolutely, all offers from him, all alliance with him. Whatever his purpose was in sending that letter back with the ambassadors of this assembly, it was not friendly, it was not peace-seeking, it was not honourable. I would I had a sword that I might draw in defiance of the King of France—for I am ready to fall fighting against him for Burgundy!"

Twoscore blades were unsheathed and their hilts presented to her. She chose Dadizeele's, and raised it high above her head, its steel flashing in the filtrated sunlight.

"I do honour to myself and to my realm," the ardent, thrilling young voice went on, "when I uplift before you the sword of Dadizeele. For God and for Burgundy!"

Not one present dared refuse to join in that cry; but not many really desired to oppose her—she was not merely appealing but, somehow, convincing.

She did not understand war, doubtless; but evidently she could lead men—like the Maid of France. They had never felt this in her until a week ago. It was like a miracle!

Steel slashed the air and glinted, and clashed against other steel. Silken banners of rose and russet and golden hues billowed in the tumult. Silver trumpets blared their notes that make the blood leap ecstatically. The grim, grey hall was a riot of colour and sound. "For God and for Burgundy!"

Once more the Princess Mary had turned defeat to what seemed like victory.

But the grey-visaged man with the hawk's patience was not deceived nor dismayed.

CHAPTER XXVI

STRIPPED OF ALL FRIENDS

WHEN Mary was in her apartments again, and this one, then that one, questioned her about something that had occurred, she could only shake her head and say:

"I know not. To me, it is all like a vaguely remembered dream."

The brief exaltation of mood which had come to her was gone again. The apathy it dispelled was not returned; but the weariness and sharp revulsion which always wait upon elation's flying heels were poignant with self-distrust.

That she had swayed the assembly of her Estates, Mary knew. She could still hear, as out of a fading dream, their hoarse, acclaiming voices, and the clash of joyous steel. But what had made her draw rein at the brink of that black precipice, she could not guess.

"It was a miracle," Margaret said devoutly, in a low tone. Her face had not yet lost its white tense look.

"A miracle!" Mary grasped at that suggestion with glad gratefulness. She had believed she was resigned to a captivity which she loved Frederick too much to let him share. She had persuaded herself that she had relinquished hopes of happiness through love in this world, and did not care how soon she could in honour be permitted to take her love among the loves immortal.

It was not really abandoning her attitude, if she thrilled at the thought of the miracle being wrought by his love, perhaps by his prayers. No! She had foreseen that love would uphold her on her difficult way, and comfort him on his. This was the first evidence vouchsafed her.

She felt very, very sad, that evening as she drifted off early into the sleep of sheer exhaustion; but exalted, withal—like Messer Dante when his most blessed lady was rapt from him into Paradise.

In the morning, after ten hours of deep, dreamless sleep, she woke to a world bathed in sunshine and glad with the glorias of free birds. Made kin with them in feeling, by her recreating rest,

she stood at her east window, and looked toward Alost, and Brussels, and Louvain, and beyond.

"I want him!" she cried, in her eager, ardent, young heart. "It is a great, glad, free world, full of love—and I want him! He is all that can make life beautiful for me."

She was twenty; and not even the perils of Burgundy could crush her for more than a time. She was twenty; and her progenitors had been free humans for longer far than they had been royal dukes.

A sound behind her made her turn from the window.

Jeanne de Halewyn stood there; and her face fortold ill news before her tongue could speak.

"What has happened?" Mary cried, her tone sharp with apprehension.

"The chancellor," Jeanne stammered, "the chancellor and Lord Humbercourt were seized last night, and haled to dungeons beneath the château."

Mary's brain was as clear this morning, thanks to her restful sleep, as the air is after certain violent storms. Yesterday she had been incapable of thought and in the state of excitation wherein

only emotions can rule. Today, her mental faculties were vigorous and in perfect control.

She dismissed Jeanne de Halewyn, wrapped a dressing-gown about herself, and sought seclusion in the window embrasure—her knees updrawn and clasped by her hands in a girlish attitude strangely inconsistent with the nature of her thoughts. She felt that she must work out in her mind what she meant to do about several very grave things, before she heard any chatter about them or was appealed to by any partisans.

Her resentment of the report Hugonet and Humbercourt gave of their embassy was tempered —at times—by her self-reminder that she had scantily and vaguely instructed them. Again—and more often than not—she argued that as men of great experience in the affairs of Burgundy, thoroughly schooled in the diplomacy of her grandfather and her father, they were far less in need of counsel from her than she was in need of it from them. They should have known—they must have known!—that the demands they agreed to were traitorous. Louis had bought them, evidently, and all three men had supposed she was too feeble, too witless, to see through their trickery.

Louis had sent her letter back, to discredit her with the Netherlanders and enfeeble any resistance they might make, for her sake, to his campaign of conquest. So far, she felt, she had pieced out the puzzle. But, why had Guelders brought the letter? (She felt sure that he had; and that the only reason he did not produce it in the assembly, was one of policy: his game were better played if he could avoid open insult to the princess.) Had he, too, been bought? Won over with the return of Guelderland? If so, why did the Flemings and the Brabantois still support him for her consort? What had Louis promised them? Independence? That were not improbable; for no one had any relish for ruling them, even with all their wealth. It would cost Louis more to keep them subject than he could get out of them.

Mary's brain began to spin dizzily. She bent her head upon her knees and tried to marshal and review every possibility.

Louis must have abandoned the idea of annexing Burgundy through marrying the dauphin with her; else, why flout her thus before all the world? If he had abandoned this project on Thursday morning, when he gave over her letter to Guelders, why

did Hugonet and Humbercourt—who left Arras that morning—tell her on Friday night that his majesty desired her to go at once to France as the betrothed of the dauphin?

Over and over and over again she considered each possibility. Yesterday's proceedings might have been a farce planned at Arras. Last night's arrest might be a part of the play! . . . She thought of everything except that madness had smitten her cunning old adversary. And there was not one she knew of whom she could ask counsel and hope to get an opinion uncoloured by personal interest.

Evidently, her resolve not to appear until her mind was settled, must be retired for a more practicable one.

She summoned her attendants. They all looked very grave.

"There is one course only that I may pursue," she thought. "Knowing nothing at all, I must contrive to appear as if I know everything."

And to this she bent her efforts quite successfully. She had what might be called the knack for royalty: she knew how to wear the part impressively.

Her audience room was full, long before she was ready to enter it. Cleves was there, with his chinless son; and Louis of Liége; and Gruuthuuse; and the Wild Boar accompanied by his younger brother Everard; and Guelders; and the Abbot of St. Bavon's; and many other persons, among them the Lady de Hugonet.

Not all her desperate anxiety could extinguish in Mary that instinct for the dramatic which is part of every lovely woman's coquetry. The morning was warm, and she had waved away all the regal gowns submitted to her, choosing a simple, almost childishly youthful dress of the fine white linen lawn of Cambrai, gathered at her slender waist and hanging soft and free to the floor. The severely plain bodice was cut square in the neck and filled in with a *modestie* of fine white net. Her headdress was a wired cap of sheerest lawn, like organdie, and through it the demure coils of her shining hair were bewitchingly evident. Mary's skin, this morning, was as delicately lovely as the blossoms of May. Her eyes were brighter than any jewels she owned.

When the lord chamberlain announced her, and the court stood at ceremonious attention to

reverence her sovereignty, she came into the room like a breath of tenderest springtime.

Lady de Halewyn's eyes filled with tears at sight of her young duchess; and the eyes of others in the company were misty, to say the least. But there were some eyes present—and they were not few—in which nothing could displace, even for a moment, the glitter of self-interest and greedy desire.

Sitting in her chair of state, canopied in cloth of gold and richest brocades of Venice velvets, Mary looked more than ever youthful and wistful and sweet; so that the dignity wherewith she carried herself was the more remarkable in contrast—as she meant it to be.

Everyone was watching with intense interest to see how the young Lady of Burgundy would receive the wife of the chancellor.

Fully aware of their breathlessness, Mary signified that she would have the Lady Hugonet presented before any one else.

"I know your sad anxiety," she said, with warm sympathy, when that noble dame knelt before her.

The wife of Hugonet was of the ultra-patrician type rare in every generation. She was not beautiful, in the usual sense, but so exquisite as

to be more than beautiful. Her features had a sculptural quality; she gave the impression of having been designed for perpetuation in marble or terra-cotta or gilt bronze; one thought of her as the descendant of innumerable great ladies whose effigies adorn Gothic tombs and bear through the centuries mute but eloquent testimony to a womanhood which was no less epic because its power was as silent as nature's own.

Her ladyship was garbed in black, this morning; and her pallor made her more than ever like an effigy. Her bearing was the expression of a dignity of soul to which a woman attains who knows the world for what it is, but does not bemoan its shortcomings as her personal, unshared affliction. She had known many sorrows; she expected to know many more. There was no shoddy humility about her resignation, but rather a high *noblesse* of spiritual courage. She had always felt herself equal to any situation her varied life called her to; she felt equal to this one. There was, probably, not one person present who would dare to show friendliness toward her, even if he felt it. But even this she accepted as the manner of courts, and not as her peculiar grievance.

"Your highness," she answered Mary, "I thank you for your consideration. My Lord Hugonet has been made prisoner. I am denied communication with him; but I am sure he knows that he was seized on some other authority than your highness's own. My petition to you, my sovereign lady, is that his lordship may be permitted to have his lawyers come to him and counsel with him before his fair and open trial which I know you, his liege, will guarantee to him."

Mary motioned to the Lady Hugonet to rise.

"By whose order," she demanded of her lords present, "was our chancellor refused counsel?"

Gruuthuuse answered her.

"Madame, my princess, the Lord Hugonet was taken for treason. And in such case counsel is appointed to the accused, not chosen by him."

"What wisdom there may be in such a custom, I do not challenge here," Mary replied, "though to my mind it seemeth that one attainted for that most despicable crime should be allowed any aid he can summon to prove his innocence—not only because the penalty is death and complete forfeiture, but because of the obloquy entailed upon all who stand in any tie with him. However, in

this case, my desire is that the chancellor who has so long served Burgundy may have his lawyers sent to him straightway. It is, presumably, the wish of every Burgundian that he and the Lord Humbercourt may be found guiltless. If, with the best aid we can grant them, they are not able to acquit themselves of conspiracy with our arch-adversary, the King of France, then we, at least, shall have nothing wherewith to reproach ourselves."

She admitted no ignorance of the order for their arrests; displayed no animus in their defence or otherwise; gave no cause to guess that she suspected Guelders. But she gathered that Cleves was furious against them because he had supposed they were supporting his son's suit; and that the prince-bishop was secretly for them, because he too was for the French alliance; whereas his prime minister, De la Marck, was against them partly because Humbercourt had curbed his cruelties in "the piteous peace" of Liége, and partly because he hoped that their conviction would stir up such a sentiment against France as would enable him to overthrow Louis of Bourbon and seize Liége for his son.

What a foul mess it all was! And yet Mary, young and undisciplined and eager to know joy, made a showing of herself that not even the bearing of Louise de Hugonet outdistanced in true dignity.

Those who had enough detachment from personal interests to feel values expressed in conduct were thrilled with a sense of Mary's command of herself and of situations. She doubtless did not comprehend one-hundredth part of what she had need to know. No one could guess, yet, what ability she would develop to get herself out of her intricate difficulties. But each time a situation evolved, she seemed somehow to dominate it and not to let it dominate her.

Toward the close of the audience, she inquired, casually, for Lord Ravestain.

"He is gone, your highness, to Cleves, on business of our duchy," his brother explained, with the bland look of a cat which had just eaten a pet bird.

There was a pregnant silence; Mary needed no one to deliver it of its further news.

In that tense moment it seemed to her that she considered a dozen different ways in which she

might receive what was coming. She looked at Lady Hugonet, who also knew what this portended, and who suffered the mortal stroke without flinching.

For an instant Mary closed her eyes to dam their tears of self-pity. Then, simply but with a royal pride which awed them all, she said:

"I understand."

She would not demean herself by asking any one of them where Margaret was; but she knew that the duchess-dowager was gone, and that she, the sovereign duchess, was scarce less in effect than her chancellor and Humbercourt a prisoner of the Flemings under Guelders; and that like them, she would be permitted no counsel save that appointed to her by her captors.

She made no further reference to the matter, and concluded her early levee as she had begun it.

Nor, when it was over and dinner was announced, was there one in all the company who durst offer her commiseration.

CHAPTER XXVII

ON THE RACK

GUELDERS was a shrewd politician. He knew the value of emotional outbursts, and the moment when persons reacting from them can be "fixed" by what the modern men of his type call "committee work." He had profound respect, and profound envy, for Mary's ability to sway crowds. Yet he was too penetrating not to know that it was a mere appeal to their emotions, and futile—because, the moment she was gone and her potency with her, men could be made to see that she had no policy of state, no grasp of the strategies of government, and that she was as inadequate as a lovely child to the enormous perplexities of Burgundy's problems both internal and international.

On the night after that sudden demonstration wherein many of the deputies had evidently let out all their loyalty with the aid of their lungs, he

had caught on the rebound those of them that really mattered, and urged the imprisonment of Hugonet and Humbercourt, the banishment of Margaret and Ravestain, and the establishment of an informal and infrangible protectorate over the princess until the matter of her marriage had been settled and with it the foreign policy of Burgundy.

The separation of Mary from her stepmother had to be diplomatically managed, of course; no overt hostility must be shown. The duchess-dowager had a splendid palace and large properties in Malines. She was urgently besought to grant her presence there, at once. Margaret knew what this meant, and they knew that she understood; but it saved her face and theirs and the princess's, and she was well aware that if she did not choose to accept this saving she would none the less have to make the move. Nothing was said about her going without seeing or sending word to the princess; but she needed no reminder that this was what would be required of her.

"Our sovereign lady," Guelders urged, in effecting this, "is too young, too innocent, too trusting, to administer such great affairs without good counsel. Consider the letter that her highness was

induced, by these four persons, to send to the King of France! What the young lady's conception of that errand was, who can guess? Perhaps she did indeed cherish a pretty faith that the old Fox of France, when he had received it, would call off his rapacious armies, restore what he has stolen from her, and promise to refrain from vexing her, evermore. Who can tell what sweet dreams might come to such a winsome maid?"

His hearers laughed condescendingly.

"Who ever," Guelders went on, "saw a head on which a crown sat more fittingly? Yet if we guard her not, she soon would have no crown to wear. What does the sweet child comprehend of the just pride of Netherlanders who lead the world in commerce and vie with the world's best in art and learning, yet have worn the yoke of foreign princes like her sires?"

Thus he led some and beguiled others—never assailing her, but only urging her need of counsel toward an end that all of them desired.

In the long days that intervened between the arrest and the trial of Hugonet and Humbercourt, Guelders refrained from anything that might savour to Mary of the prosecution of his wooing.

He was in her court constantly, dominant in every matter; but rather as a self-constituted minister than as one who supposed himself to be the prospective consort.

Mary's bearing in those difficult days was perfect. What her chamber witnessed at night of her long anguish, no one knew; only Vite shared her vigils in the east window, which often lasted until the dawn-fires had paled her westering star. But her demeanour before her court was both gentle and proud in a way that won admiration from all. To the ignominy of her position she never alluded; but no one could doubt that she felt it to the uttermost.

Someone—she guessed who, but confided her surmise to none—maintained a veritable reign of terror among her servants; so that any of them who spoke to her in a low tone, or who opened a letter that had not first been scrutinized by the lord chamberlain, was not permitted to remain for another quarter of an hour in her service. This, Mary bore without comment, even to admit that she noticed it.

Nine days dragged by, and nine interminable nights. She gave orders upon scores of matters

presented to her, but had no means of knowing in what degree, if any, they were obeyed. But what Guelders's ascendancy was, she could compute from the waning power of Cleves and Louis de Bourbon.

On the tenth day, the stage was set in the Council Hall of the Hôtel de Ville for the trial of the chancellor and Humbercourt on the charge of receiving bribes from the King of France and betraying, therefor, Arras into his hands.

Humbercourt, being a Knight of the Golden Fleece, was entitled to trial by his peers of that order; but he was not receiving this right from Guelders, at whose trial and expulsion from the order he had assisted Duke Charles, years ago. Furthermore, one of the lawyers appointed to prosecute him was an enemy of long standing, Everard de la Marck, younger brother of the Wild Boar of the Ardennes.

Neither of the accused was subject to the jurisdiction of Ghent, but to that of the Duchy of Burgundy for the chancellor and to the civil law of Picardy for Humbercourt if his right to a trial before the Council of the Golden Fleece were disallowed.

Nevertheless, the town magistrates of Ghent sat in judgment on them. And although six days were consumed by the hearing of evidence against them and of their replies thereto, the conclusion of it all was foregone from before the start.

On the sixth day, they were taken from the Town Hall before sentence had been passed on them, and put upon the rack in the torture chamber of the château; later, broken and bleeding, they were carried thence, in chairs, to the judgment hall where they were found guilty and condemned to die upon the scaffold within three hours. That the farce might be complete, the scaffold was erected before they were even put to the torture; and stood ready in the Marché du Vendredi for hours prior to the passing of sentence upon them.

During those days, Mary's suspense was unrelieved by a single trustworthy report of what was going on. Her pride would not permit her to incur indignity by asking questions which would probably not be answered; and no one durst speak to her about the trial of her ministers which was also, in effect, a trial of herself as author of the fatal letter.

Many hearts ached with pity for her; and everyone about her had to admire her, whether his hopes lay one way or another.

The spectacle of the sweet, wistful young thing that she was, moving alone—always, always alone—in the panoply of her magnificent court, and bearing the burden of destiny for so much of Europe, was one to stir the emotions of even the dullest onlooker. And Mary had that subtle quality which vivifies every situation.

Close observers were aware of a remarkable development in the princess, in the weeks just passed; but few of them were able to analyse it.

What was happening in the girl's soul was the struggle to relinquish her dream, her desire, and dedicate herself a living sacrifice to Burgundy. She knew, now, that the enmity between her sovereignty and France was mortal. She knew that her chinless, stupidly sensual young cousin of Cleves could not help her against Guelders, even if she could stomach his help. She knew that Edward of England would not lift a finger to aid her against France, because his hope was to wed Elizabeth of York with the rickety dauphin. There was no one to whom she could turn for support in her

desperate stand, except the emperor; and he, alone of all those who might profit through her marriage, was not pressing for alliance with her. He was a strange, incalculable old man. There had been that terrible humiliation suffered by her father when the emperor had assembled his army and his court at Trèves and summoned thither his great vassal, Charles, to crown him King of Belgian Gaul; and Charles had taken with him a retinue the like of which, for dazzling splendour and impressive strength, Europe had never seen; and the festivities had proceeded from one display of magnificence to another—until the coronation day dawned upon Charles at Trèves and upon the emperor (who had sneaked during the night) somewhere en route with all haste for home.

If he had dared do thus to mighty, unconquered Charles (whose heiress was even then bespoken for the emperor's only son), what might he not do now, if the girl whom everybody was despoiling entreated him for aid?

These were the things Mary had to ponder during those days, and nights.

On the day when her ministers were put to the torture what time their scaffold was being erected

in the square of the Friday market, Mary read the horror in many faces at court. Even though Guelders and the Netherlands party had gradually eliminated from the royal household nearly all persons of known sympathy with the French alliance, there were some—like the Bishop of Liége—whom they did not quite dare, yet, to move against openly; policy obliged them to treat him, and certain others, with deference, while keeping closest espionage on all their intercourse.

Louis de Bourbon, Prince-Bishop of Liége, is not credited anywhere in history (of which by his incompetence he made so much) with affection for any creature, nor with abiding interest in anything but dissipation and the money to indulge in it; but he knew that his continued income lay in the French balance of the Burgundian scale, and decidedly not in the Netherlands; and he must have had some sort of personal feeling for Humbercourt, who had shared so many perils with him and done him so many services.

At any rate, he was visibly perturbed. He had lived through such a welter of blood-letting that it may not have been the sight of the black-draped scaffold which unnerved him; it may have been his

fear that this proof of Guelders's ascendancy presaged the doom of Louis de Bourbon's job.

His purplish, vinous countenance showed positive pallor, that morning; his weak, watery eyes seemed suddenly thrust forward in their sockets; his thin thatch of grey hair was damp with a cold dew.

When his niece saw him, she concluded that her ministers were dead. He was not permitted to speak privately with her; and he was not disobeying orders, just now. But he answered Mary's questioning glance with a look indicating the worst that could happen.

She gripped the arms of her chair of state, and a sick tremor ran through all her veins.

Then Guelders entered—a little less grey than usual, a little less restrained, a little elate; two of his enemies were on the rack.

At sight of him, two crimson spots of royal rage flamed in the cheeks of the princess. As he knelt before her, his demeanour was grave; but she felt that behind the mask he wore which made her long to slay him that moment, ere he could rise.

And yet, she could not bring herself to con-

descend battle with him, even for her rights. If she could kill him with a blow, that her pride and her loathing would permit. But to struggle with him in any way was not possible to her.

He eyed her searchingly for some evidence that she knew what was happening. But he got none.

Then, knowing how his presence tortured her, he remained to dine in her company.

A hideous function was that meal; everyone present was aware, in some degree, of the torture and doom of the two ministers whose participation in all court affairs had been more frequent than that of almost any others in the realm; and not even the accustomedness to bloodshed, which in the fifteenth century held over from the Middle Ages, could make men and women indifferent to a tragedy like this. Moreover, everyone was fearful for what it presaged; no one could be sure what his own head would be worth presently.

When it was over, Mary withdrew to her chamber; and there was a general dispersing.

Jeanne de Halewyn followed her sovereign, unbidden.

"Madame, my princess," she said, "I think my heart will burst unless you let me speak to you out

of its depths. These bitter days and weeks past I have almost died to see you suffer so, and to know that you could not trust me even if I had dared to comfort you. I am come to that place where I am willing to die, if need be; but I must first serve you. There is no time now to talk. If God will, we may do that later. The chancellor and Humbercourt are not yet even sentenced, but have been broken on the rack, this morning, and will be carried to the block shortly. I do not know what your highness's will is. But if you wish to go to the Hôtel de Ville to protest against their sentence, I will aid you—if I die for it tonight."

. . . Fifteen minutes later, a girl who looked as if she might be some distraught supplicant coming from presenting an appeal to the princess, stole fearfully through the unpeopled corridors of the palace and to the door which gave upon the gardens. She was dressed all in black, and on her head was a kerchief such as peasants wear. The door she sought was locked, but not guarded. Drawing the bolt, she was presently in that long alley down which she had run so gleefully one Sunday afternoon, ages ago, to meet her love; and

up which she had walked so sadly after she had set free the birds.

Through the maze to its centre, and then back—three turns to the left and then to the right each other turn—and out by the postern, and along the quai, with flying feet. How quiet every place was! Past the frowning château with its dreadful dungeons; on and on through the Place Sainte Pharaïlde where executions took place at which the whole of Ghent was not interested to be present; and past the fish and the vegetable markets. There the crowds began. The street leading to the Hôtel de Ville was choked with them. The girl in black, with the peasant's kerchief, had to fight her way through dense masses of market-folk and other citizens who gave place to nobody, but stood each his own ground stoutly and dealt roughly with all who contested it.

How she got through those throngs, she never knew. Desperation lent her not only courage but strength—and, too, she was the only child of Charles the Bold.

Her heart was pounding furiously, choking off her breath; her mouth was dry and there was an agonizing constriction in her throat. At times,

the surging humans combed toward her or receded like monstrous waves, battering her against buildings or sucking her into a hideous, irresistible undertow. She was a bit of flotsam in it all—and yet, somehow she got near and nearer to the centre of the maelstrom.

As she neared the doors of the Town Hall, the crowd seemed to loosen, to break into streams, and to move slowly through the narrow streets leading to the Friday Market.

She made her way into the Council Hall. Her kerchief had been pulled off and her abundant hair hung dishevelled about her shoulders. She looked like a mad creature; but everyone was so tense with excitement that no notice was taken of her.

The Council Hall was empty.

Again she breasted the human surge, and was tossed by it, beaten back, pushed forward, buffeted, bruised, but came at last into the great market-place where for centuries the Gantois had staged their popular spectacles. Here they had assembled to do homage to the Counts of Flanders on their accession; and here they had gathered, at the sound of the tocsin from the belfry, to repudiate that homage, whenever they thought they had a griev-

ance. Much blood had been shed here, and much tumult had been raised; but not in all the history of the turbulent Gantois had a scene of more intense emotion been enacted here—not even when Jacques van Artevelde burned the papal interdict against Flanders and led the malcontents in revolt against their ruler and against their liege the King of France.

At the south-west corner of the square was the huge iron cannon which the Gantois called "Mad Meg"; and today Meg's nose was pointed significantly inward, to command the assembling place.

The scaffold was set up against the high, timbered houses on the east side; and the narrow openings out of the market-place into the place St. Jacques were blocked with steel-helmeted pikemen.

The black cloth with which the scaffold was draped was not so much a tribute to the exalted rank of the condemned, as a braggart reminder of what high heads Guelders and the Gantois dared to bring low.

In chairs, as they had been carried thither from the judgment hall, the broken, bleeding heaps of human wreckage that had been her august min-

isters awaited the strokes which would end their agony.

"People of Ghent—my people!" the Lady of Burgundy cried. "I am your sovereign; hear me! Who will put me on that scaffold where I may speak?"

Among those near her in the throng none recognized her, and many jeered at the dishevelled girl who called herself Duchess of Burgundy. But one, a butcher, was able to feel that in her which was accustomed to command. He raised her to his shoulder, and fought through the crowd, crying:

"Way for the princess! Way! Way!"

At last, he got her to the scaffold; and when she stood there, many knew her and hushed their neighbours that they might hear what she was saying.

Once more Mary looked down upon that sea of upturned faces which typified to her the instability of those who were called her subjects.

What the feeling of these people was, for or against her, she did not know. Their knowledge of her and of her real attitude toward them was little, indeed; but not less than her understanding of their attitude toward her. She was fed on her

courtiers' interpretations of her people; and they were fed on their deputies' representations of her. Her direct contacts with them were few and constrained.

Perhaps they desired her death as well as that of her ministers!

But it was not death that Mary feared—it was life under certain conditions.

"My people, my Gantois!" she cried, "I know not what miscarriage of the truth there has been between you and me. But I am here to tell you that you have been misled, as I have been. These lords, my ministers, whom your magistrates have adjudged deserving of death, went to the king at my behest. I thought I saw a way to bring his majesty to terms of peace. I knew he could not be defied—at present. I thought I knew how he could be cajoled. It is his own game. I played against him, and I lost. The penalty should be mine and not my ambassadors'."

"Who gave him Arras?" a hoarse voice yelled at her surlily. And other hoarse voices gave it back like the echo of daws croaking: "Ay! Who?"

"Arras was his," she answered; "by the terms

of the treaty between his majesty's father and my grandfather; it reverted to France, lawfully, when Burgundy had no male heir. Was it better to let Louis take it by siege, and hang our Crèvecœur as a traitor—or to get Crèvecœur named Louis's governor? Which, think you, gives Burgundy the stronger hold on Arras—against that day when we may make it ours again?"

There were murmurs of approval from tho whose shrewdness was tickled by this.

"You have not waited on our diplomacy, to learn whether it may not be effective for a people having no army to argue with," she went on. "You have let yourselves be swayed by prejudice. If you thought these lords had sold your interest to the king, at my bidding, why did you not call me to judgment also? Why did you connive with those who kept all knowledge of these proceedings from me? I was not asked to testify for or against them at their trial. I was not told that they were being tried, until all was done save this last injustice. But I am here, now, while the spark is left in them that may be called life, to tell you what it was that drove me to send them for that parley with my godfather, the king. It was not

lack of love for Burgundy, for Netherlands! It was not lack of pride in my inheritance—what man among you thinks I would see it made an appanage of France? It was fear—the most awful fear a woman may feel. Death has no terrors for me—as you shall know, presently, if I am driven further as I have been. But I will not be wed with Guelders, whose bloody work this is! To forestall that, I sent these lords to Arras! Will you stand by and see them killed for trying to serve your princess?"

"No! No!" cried hundreds.

But other hundreds, schooled by the Guelders party, shouted that the princess did not understand; that the condemned ministers had duped and betrayed her; and that, whether they were or were not justifiable for the embassy to Arras, there were many other reasons—dating back through Charles's reign—why these men should suffer death.

Guelders was far too wily ever to put himself in open opposition to the princess; his pose was that of her kinsman and defender, whose aid in governing she needed, for that she was of such tender inexperience. These, her people, might torment her

and defy her; but they would not repudiate her, he knew. He, if he would rise, must rise with her. And somehow he must make it seem that her repugnance to marriage with him was the wilfulness of a spoiled sweet child who did not know what was for her own good.

He stepped forth, now, from one of the guild houses behind the scaffold, emerging through a window in the great council room on the second floor. His grey face was greyer even than its wont was.

The men-at-arms on guard made way for him, as he pushed toward the place where the princess stood.

A hiss broke and crackled zigzag through the throng like a thin licking line of fire in dry grass.

Guelders smiled.

Then someone cried: "Long live Netherlands!" And a thousand voices echoed the cry.

Lifting his hand to entreat silence, Guelders shouted:

"Loving the Lady of Burgundy, we have tried to spare her tender heart knowledge of this that must be done to protect her. You will but love her more for her distress that you have witnessed,

proving her gentleness. But someone must be stern, if Burgundy perish not, a prey to traitors. Headsman—your duty!"

The man in crimson stepped into view from among the group at the scaffold's rear.

Every window overlooking the square was crowded with spectators, and from one of these, suddenly, the piercing scream of an hysterical woman rang out upon the momentary hush that had succeeded Guelders's command.

The mass of creatures packed into the market-place heaved convulsively, like the crust of a volcano before eruption; and scores, then hundreds, struggled toward the scaffold to climb upon it.

A sharp word of command, and two hundred pikemen pushed in from the narrow streets leading to the Place St. Jacques, jamming back the on-slaught with point of steel.

Shrieks of agony, of terror, of rage, mingled in a tumult as if someone had lifted the trap-door of hell.

Backward and forward the masses swayed.

Guelders tried to lead the princess away, but she flung off his hand from touching her, and stood mutely imploring.

In the roar of voices and the rattle of steel, she could hear nothing distinguishable. But an instinct moved her to turn around.

The gory heaps of what had been her ministers' bodies lay in the chairs from which they had not moved since the torture-chamber spewed them; and their heads rolled in two crimson pools on the black floor.

Mary knelt down and crossed herself. About her there was somewhat of that look Louise de Hugonet had worn when she came petitioning the right of sending counsel to her husband; the look of one dead to the self-pity which makes us either rage or moan; the look of one reborn in consciousness of a spirit which makes us bear or sacrifice as we are called to do.

CHAPTER XXVIII

"TELL HIM THAT SHE IS DEAD"

SUPPER was served, that afternoon, privately to the princess and a few of her ladies. Little was eaten, and little was said. The nausea induced by horror had stolen both appetite and speech from all; but only her highness uttered no plaint.

When she could, she summoned Jeanne de Halewyn to her, privately.

"Tonight," she said, "I shall write a letter to the duchess-dowager—one that I wish her to have without the knowledge of any here. Canst find a way to send it safely and quickly to her at Malines?"

"I think I can," Jeanne answered. "Shall I seek out a messenger while your highness writes?"

"Yes. I can lay me down with better hope of rest when I know this letter is on its eastward way."

In the early years of his reign, Louis XI. had established postal service on most of the main routes of France; but no other countries had yet followed his lead, and communication was still mainly by private messenger. Court correspondence passed quite regularly between different points in Burgundy where court interests were; but Mary knew that everything she wrote to Margaret at Malines was not less than twice scanned on its passage from her hand to Margaret's. This letter must go otherwise.

"I desire you," it said, "to send a message to one you wot well, at the Bald Eagle Inn, Innsbrück, Tirol. Tell him, as tenderly as may be, that she whom he loved and who loved him is dead. In token thereof, enclose this glove—which he may, in truth, scarcely recognize; so worn it is with much kissing, and damped with many tears. Entreat him to be a little glad for her, that she is through with tears—but not too glad! Tell him her word for him was, that Paradise will not bloom for her until he is there with her, endlessly. Say that her bidding was that he do stoutly what is demanded of him, and turn not aside from it to follow any dream. Heaven is where God gives us

our desire—unless we make Him wroth by too much seeking of it here. Urge upon him that his heart is his—and hers to whom he gave it; but his service is that whereunto he is called. . . . There is so much I fain would say through you. But if my pen were tipped, like Messer Dante's, with celestial light, I could not write the half that my heart dictates.

"When thou hast written this, and sent it to Tirol, choose messengers of other sort, I pray, and charge them with this that I address to the Duke of Austria. I did not think that I should need to woo; but since he seeks me not, I—for my realm's safety—ask him to come to me. There is no other to whom I can turn. If he hears not my plea, then I shall know God has deserted me for my past wilfulness—the which I do indeed deserve, but pray His mercy."

The letter to the Duke of Austria was touched with a high humility. The only dignified attitude Mary could take was in assuming that the old betrothal between his highness and herself had never been lightly regarded by either of them. She could not write and propose marriage with the

emperor's son; she could only write and urge him to hasten his coming.

"Most dear and friendly lord and brother," her letter to him ran, "from my heart, I greet you. You must not doubt that I will agree to the treaty made between us by my lord and father, now in glory, and will be a true wife to you; for I doubt not you will do likewise. The bearer knows how hemmed in I am, and I cannot open my mind to him, as God knoweth it. I pray you not to linger, as your coming will bring help and comfort to my lands; but if you come not, my lands can look for no aid; and I may be driven to do that which I would not—by force, against my will—if you forsake me."

These letters were on their way before the Princess of Burgundy retired on the night of that bloody day.

The Lady Halewyn earnestly desired permission to sleep in her mistress's chamber, but was gently put off.

"It is not solitude that makes me afraid," Mary said, "it is people—presences. Not yours, dear! But the balm my soul craves for its healing, is silence and the company of stars. When I

stand in the sweet, soothing dark, and look up to where God dwells among His heavenly hosts, I realize how all things have been ordained by Him, like the stars' courses, from the dawn of time; and I grow more content to do His will and travel in the orbit He has marked out for me. Sometimes I see a shooting star, going its own wild way into oblivion. And then I think how kinglier they are who move in their path appointed, and shine each in his place and time, to tell us how God keeps His rules and promises."

Not one tear dampened Mary's pillow that night. Those minutes on the scaffold, her blood baptism, had made her almost awfully consecrate —as his first battle for his country sometimes makes a young soldier. She had made her supreme relinquishment; and she was not of the stuff that whines or martyrizes. She was done with self-pity, now, because she was done with self-consideration. And it was easier to be vowed to Burgundy since that Sunday in the heart o' the maze, when she had realized how unfitted for a cage he was whom her heart desired. He was free to climb his Alpine passes, or roam storied places; to sing and make poesy; to plead for knighthood; to fight,

mayhap, for Holy Sepulchre. And she loved him so greatly that she was glad for him. He would love her always, as he roved and fought or sang. That which she had kindled in his soul would never die. And some day, when God willed, they would be reunited in those fair fields of Heaven where immortal lovers dwell.

No answer to her letter could come from the Duke of Austria for many days; and Mary wondered how she should hold off her urgent suitors till that time—what device, like Penelope's, she might take refuge in.

That her declarations against King Louis, in the Council and on the scaffold of her ministers, would travel on the wind's wings to Louis's ears, she could not doubt; nor that he would retaliate by some act or acts of especial violence against her provinces.

What he did was to contrive through bribery to put a garrison of his forces into the free city of Tournai and from thence make forays into Hainault and Flanders—robbing, burning, laying waste, until the inhabitants of Mary's plundered villages cried to her with voices that would not be stilled.

It was no use to say to these outraged subjects: "Burgundy is sorry for you; but Burgundy cannot redress your wrongs, because Burgundy has no army."

Their answer to that was ready enough: "We pay our taxes for protection. Years past our revenues have gone to wage wars of conquest; now, when we are sacked, we call for help and none is forthcoming. But there is one who, for our fealty and our tribute moneys, will guarantee us our lives and our possessions. Send! Or we acclaim Louis of France."

To this demand the towns of Bruges, Ghent, and Ypres, responded by raising and equipping an army from among their citizens. And at the head of this army they put Guelders, with orders to invest Tournai and shut in the French marauders as in a trap.

On the day before he departed with his unseasoned troop of about eight hundred horsemen and fewer men-at-arms, he came to the palace and, for the first time since the night of his return from Arras with the princess's letter in his pocket, asked for a private audience.

Her highness was in the tennis-court playing

at *jeu de paume*, a vigorous, exhilarating exercise which had to serve her, nowadays, in the stead of riding and hunting.

She was flushed and more than a bit dishevelled when the duke's request was brought to her by one of her gentlemen-in-waiting.

Her first instinct, always, on the approach of Guelders, was to protect herself against him as much as she could by the assumption of all possible evidence of her sovereignty; it was as if she had thought he must accord some respect to her position that he might not accord to her person.

But now, this did not occur to her.

"Tell his grace," she said, "that the princess will receive him in the gardens—it is warm!—in the bird gardens—by the little pond where the strange auk sits."

Dismissing those young demoiselles and gentlemen of her household, with whom she had been at play, she ordered only Jeanne de Halewyn and one of the lord chamberlain's staff to attend her.

Jeanne made a move to put back under the princess's cap those gold-brown locks which had strayed from beneath it and were wantonly curling about the moist temples. But Mary laughingly

pushed them up with the back of her hand—nor seemed to care that in a moment they came tumbling forth again.

To all appearances, she was as full of animation engendered by the game as if the thought of Guelders had never made her flesh creep with horror.

Her eyes, as Duke Adolph approached, were full of dancing lights; her exquisite skin was warmly pink; the abandoned wisps of hair bobbed shamelessly with the movements of her head, which behaved as if it had never worn a crown. She was still a little breathless.

Adolph could scarcely control his amazement, his chagrin. He had come to thrust his hated presence upon a haughty young sovereign of congealed demeanour; and he was confronting a rollicking child who disconcerted him unpardonably.

Mary looked from him to the melancholy bird that had made such a brief and decisive parley with the penguin who was not her choice; and then back again to Guelders—and laughed.

It was hysteria, not mirth; but Adolph did not understand.

"I amuse your highness?" he asked resentfully.

"A little—at long intervals," Mary replied. "Just now, I had to laugh at myself, sitting here between yon solemn bird and you that are more solemn. It is a grave world!"

"Your highness does not seem to find it so," he retorted, sharply.

She shrugged her shoulders as if to say: What is the use?

"I leave tomorrow morning at sun-up," he went on, "to take protection to your grace's subjects, harassed by French invaders."

He looked full at her as he spoke, and her brown eyes did not flinch from his meaningful scrutiny.

If he came back victorious, having routed the enemy of her people's peace, she might not be permitted by those people to accept any other hand than his.

More days than enough to hear from the Duke of Austria had gone by. Perhaps he would not come!

Almost, the laughter died in Princess Mary's eyes. Then she looked again toward the lone bird.

"I pray God to bless Burgundy," she said, as simply as a fervent, uncomprehending child.

And therewith she ran back to her play.

CHAPTER XXIX

A "JOYOUS ENTRY"

EACH day Mary missed from her court or from some administrative office, a Burgundian; and found in his place a Netherlander. Occasionally some show was made of consulting her about these changes and having her ratification for them; more often, she was the last person to learn of them. It did not matter; the result in either case was bound to be the same. She was sovereign in name only; she could not enforce her preferences.

She missed the suavity of the Latins who were so congenial with her; she missed their grace, and their genius for culture, and their charm. She had not realized how almost wholly French her associations had been. She had not known how alien in spirit and every feeling she was to the Flemings and Brabantois and Hollanders who now hemmed her in.

But she made no complaint.

Cleves lingered at Ghent, taking advantage of Guelders's absence to press the suit of his son.

Mary's ingenuity was taxed not infrequently, to put off the old man who nagged her and entreated her and flattered her by turns—all in the interest of that vapid and vicious boy who, if suddenly accepted by the princess, would have had to be sought in the haunts of shamelessness.

The Bishop of Liége had departed, unprotested. Not even his niece was loath to see him go; for his interest in keeping the good will of France was so avid that he desired Mary to take no account of King Louis's behaviour to her, but to open other negotiations for marriage with the dauphin. Anything, for Louis of Bourbon, to keep that job of his!

Gruuthuuse was much at court; but Mary was never able to satisfy herself what part he played in the politics of the Netherlanders. He was shrewd enough either to avoid involving himself, or if he were involved, to avoid letting Mary know what party he served.

The one Fleming whom she inclined to trust and to like was Dadizeele. He was for Netherlands

and against French dominance; but his policies were discreet, humane, constructive; and his affection for the princess was evidently sincere. He had, too, the confidence of the Flemings, save at such times as they were inflamed beyond reason.

Mary felt toward him as she might have felt, were her imprisonment of the ordinary sort, toward a kind-hearted gaoler.

The long days wore away, somehow. Each morning came up out of the east rosy with promise, like most young things. Today those overdue German messengers might come, perhaps bringing the Duke of Austria with them, an eager bridegroom! Mary looked often and long out of her east window, hoping to catch the first glint of June sunlight on burnished spear points. But each day's youth sped into a garish noonday, dragged into a somnolent afternoon, and came, empty of excuse for being, to the shadows of evening—like many lives.

Word came that the little army of Guelders had invested Tournai, closing in the French marauders. The Flemings were elate.

"Could such a thing be," Mary entreated of

Jeanne de Halewyn, "as that Duke Maximilian would disregard my letter?"

Jeanne yearned to reassure her highness, but feared to feed the girl's hope.

"Dear my lady, I know not," she answered. "The Germans are not much constrained by courtesy. I think they do whatever seems to them for their advantage, and think little of aught else."

Mary smiled ruefully.

"Mayhap," she said, "I should rather have allowed Burgundy to perish, and I with it, than entreat his aid."

"Ah, no!" Jeanne cried. "The duke is young, and report credits him with love of learning and of the arts. With such a consort as your highness will make, he must needs become not unendurable, either as husband or as a sharer of your rule."

Mary pinched Jeanne's cheek.

"God love thee, thou dear comforter!" she said, tenderly. "If he come not, therein lies proof he is a boor. And if he come, I may be sure that I shall like him!"

They both laughed; but there was no mirth in it.

It was Dadizeele who suggested that which he thought might be welcome to the Lady of Burgundy in these trying days.

"Your highness," he said, "has never been formally acclaimed Duchess of Brabant. The Brabantois have not even seen you since you became their sovereign; and they make a special claim of you, for that you came into the world within their province. Would it please your highness to go in state to Louvain, to make your joyous entry?"

"Now?" Mary asked.

"Whenever your highness wills."

"These June days," she murmured wistfully, "are exceeding fair."

It was of them she was thinking, Dadizeele reflected tenderly, rather than of policies or pageantry.

He went, accordingly, to the principal deputies of Brabant who were in Ghent, and laid the matter before them.

A week later, there wound out through the Brussels Gate, about six o'clock in the morning, a magnificent cavalcade.

The new day was still tender, with the virgin

sweetness of a little maid. The moat beneath the walls of Ghent was all a-blossom with pond-lilies, their waxen petals open to the morning sun. The white road to eastward ran between deep ditches lined with verdure, starred with dandelions and buttercups, and powdered with white clover blooms; now, tall poplars bordered it for a straight mile or so, like men-at-arms in dress formation; again, it was arched by oak or elm; and anon, it entered a forest and ambled a leisurely while in a dense shade.

In the rich pasture-lands, great herds of black and white cattle grazed, and many flocks of sheep.

A fresh breeze kept the wings of innumerable windmills flying, and their clack-clacking made a kind of cheerful, humble music—part of the matin hymn which the skylarks led, and the carillons in village belfries joined, and the cooing pigeons, bleating lambs, and laughing children perfected.

The grain and the flax were high enough to billow like a pale-green sea, over which butterflies skimmed like gay little craft with sails painted in the colors of a Venetian fishing fleet.

On the banks of the Scheldt, which the road touched frequently, village women knelt in pleas-

ant companies, rolling beneath their tongues tid-bits of gossip as they washed their family linen in the swift-flowing stream. They rose up, one and all of them, as the royal cavalcade passed by, and peered, with hands shading their dazzled eyes, to catch a glimpse of their young sovereign.

As a picture, she was worth a determined effort to see. Her mount was the pride of her vast stables, and Mary's delight in his beauty and his mettle was too great to have him gaudily caparisoned. Had he been Pegasus, he could hardly have touched the road more lightly nor struck from it a more joyous, rhythmical beat. His response to her mood was perfect. And if Sandro Filipepi could have seen her, he might have painted "Springtime" on horseback instead of afoot.

She rode the newly fashionable side-saddle, which displayed to all advantage the lovely lines of her figure in its close-fitting bodice and long, flowing skirt. Her riding costume was of white cloth and she had a plumed velvet hat—which was a thing to wonder at, as she went dancing by.

All about her rode the panoply of her splendid court: ladies-in-waiting clothed in gorgeous brocades; gentlemen-in-waiting, likewise arrayed;

ministers of state with great weight of gold embroidery and jewels on their flaunting mantles; knights and esquires in full plate armour of burnished steel, intricately engraved and inlaid, and over their cuirasses long capes of cloth of gold; pikemen in chain mail, their blades flashing and glinting; archers clad for nimbleness and to show their sinews; household servants without number; sumpter horses and mules as for an army, laden with a magnificence to dazzle Brussels and Louvain.

Straightening their toil-bent backs, and staring, the washing-women spoke, one to another, of how much this was that was given to one girl: youth, health, beauty, and vast wealth, unnumbered suitors—all that Fortune has to bestow. And she, who had struggled so valiantly to be done with self-pity, felt a mist in her eyes and an ache in her throat whenever she looked beyond the glitter of her many gaolers to the free women in cottage doorways or by reedy banks.

The sixteen miles to Alost were easily covered before ten o'clock; and there they dined in such state as the town could spread, all the local luminaries attending. At noon, although the sun was

hot, they took the road again for Brussels, where they were come by four o'clock.

Mary was fond of the palace at Brussels where she had come into the world; it had many sweet associations with her mother and with those unshadowed years before the gentle Isabelle left her little girl motherless.

The old, eleventh-century castle on the Koudenberg, commanding the valley of the Senne, was much amplified in Mary's day; so that it was only the nucleus of a great pile of buildings in which Burgundian magnificence was flaunted to as breath-taking effect as anywhere. What Mary loved best, though, was not the palace but the park; within the city walls, yet large enough for a hunting domain, and so used by the dukes. She hoped for a stay in Brussels long enough to permit her some enjoyment of the park. The next day was the one appointed for her joyous entry into Louvain; but when that was over, there might, Mary thought, be nothing urged against a sojourn in Brussels on the return to Ghent.

Louvain had been declining in commercial and political importance for nearly a hundred years. So many of its once celebrated cloth-weavers had

emigrated to Holland and to England that the great Gothic hall of their guild was now the main building of the university attended by several thousand students. The dissensions of the industrial population with their rulers had caused both classes to dislike the town, the Dukes of Brabant and their courtiers preferring Brussels and by their residence in that city greatly helping it to wealth and prominence. Hundreds of houses in Louvain were uninhabited in Mary's day—foreshadowing the time when oxen would plough great spaces within the fourteenth-century fortifications—and an air of proud poverty pervaded the town.

For the acclamation of their young sovereign, though, the forty-odd thousand citizens remaining made a brave show of regal hospitality. They were not so rich as Bruges and Ghent, but their traditions were older, their culture was mellower and more full-bodied; their effort was to display, not opulence—with which their princess must indeed be surfeited—but such elegance as befitted a town to which was committed the instruction of Netherlands youth. Wealth, they argued, may make a nation powerful; but learning must direct that power if the nation is to become great.

The ducal procession entered by the Brussels Gate and flowed down the rue de Bruxelles to the Grande Place, between the Hôtel de Ville and the unfinished church of St. Pierre.

From every window along the route, fine old silken banners waved, or priceless tapestries hung. High houses they were, with many-storeyed gables and fantastic timberwork. Here was one with, apparently, half the Old Testament personages from Adam to Ezekiel, telling their stories in sculptured wood, and often with coarse jocosity. Here, beside it, was a façade of stucco between great, rough-hewn beams; and every foot of stucco gilded and painted—figures in the Last Judgment writhing or flapping about the first-floor windows, and Lazarus rising from his grave up near the gable's point. Next door, a balcony with a simulated window behind, contained two amazingly carved statues that sat perpetually as if waiting for pageants to pass beneath.

Every window framed a half-dozen heads, at least, as the ducal procession went by, a-glitter with steel and cloth of gold, ablaze with gems, a-flutter with flags, and a-flaunt with gorgeous colourings.

Her highness was carried in a superb litter borne by eight noble lords and attended by twelve ladies of high degree. The impression her subjects got of her was principally an effect of glitter.

Decoration centred in the Grande Place, where the formal ceremonies of acclamation and oath-taking occurred. It was all exceedingly imposing; but the impression Mary got of her subjects in Louvain was that they meant to wrest, if possible, some concessions from her which might stop the deflection of Louvain's importance to Brussels. They did! Under cover of a most wearisome amount of talk about undying loyalty and unswerving devotion, there ran a flavour of barter, almost of intimidation—like the taint of a bad egg in a cake iced elaborately with decorations of hearts and darts.

Mary's heart was away out in the green world of June—June in that Tirol where the fields are as blue with forget-me-nots as the sky is blue that bends above them!—but she was most earnestly trying to keep her head on affairs of state; and she was quick to detect the quality of this acclamation —as quick, too, to realize that she had no power to resist any demand. Even a reminiscent old gran-

dame among her cities, swathed in the faded splendours of a departed glory, could dictate to her the terms of its allegiance. Where was that strong arm for whose help she had appealed?

There were feastings and gala spectacles for two days and two nights. Wine flowed through great conduits and gushed from festal fountains. Angels in gauze and gilt dropped fearfully down from the sky to crown Mary with garlands supposedly celestial. Saints and other good folk of bygone days popped up in all sorts of unlikely places, to assure her of their guardianship. Parsifal's son and his swans emerged from a gigantic pastry. There was a tournament at which Mary was the Queen of Love.

Everyone from miles around who could get to Louvain was there. The streets and market-places were a thronged gingerbread fair. Acrobats tumbled and jugglers mystified and gypsies stole and merchants throve and swains courted and maidens flirted and soldiers caroused and children went wild with glee. Great times for Louvain, while the young duchess held court in the castle on Mont Cesar where Julius Caesar

had builded and dwelt! But Mary knew what it was all worth to her sovereignty.

As she was re-entering Brussels, a man stepped from among the bystanders near the Porte de Louvain, and halted her, crying:

"The right of appeal! Appeal to your highness!"

Mary reined her horse and signed to her guard that the man was to be permitted nearer. He was a handsome man of elegant appearance—the sort much more commonly seen in court than presenting a cause thus. But also he seemed to be foreign, one who might not know the usage of these parts.

He handed a letter to one of her highness's guards, who gave it to her.

"Madame," this began, after a punctilious enumeration of all her titles and prescribed forms of address, "the ambassadors of his imperial majesty, the emperor, on their way to present themselves before you at Ghent, have been advised, here, that your highness does not desire audience with them. Upon your confirmation of this advice, we will return to the emperor without stating his

business. If we have been misinformed, we await your pleasure."

The blood rushed to Mary's face the instant her eye caught the emperor's name. These must be they whose coming she had long awaited.

"By whose orders were the ambassadors of his imperial majesty to us, so advised?" she demanded in a clear voice.

"By order of your highness's kinsman, the Duke of Cleves," was the reply.

"His grace," the princess said, "was of some misapprehension. "We do most earnestly desire that the emperor's business with us be brought before us and the Council of our Estates, at Ghent —the day after tomorrow! And if your embassy will sup with us at the palace, this evening, it will greatly pleasure us to hear of the health of our liege, and of his good happiness in all things."

His majesty's four ambassadors were well-advised of the princess's situation, and much pleased with the spirit of her commands.

They waited upon her at supper in the palace; mingled with her curious courtiers; and got away without giving either here or there a single hint as to the nature of their mission.

Once more the Lady of Burgundy sat in her chair of state in that grim, great Council Hall of the château. And once again excitement ran high, and speculation over the outcome was feverish.

The deputies had, in secret conference, agreed that in view of their young sovereign's invitation, it would ill-behoove her parliament to refuse hearing to the emperor. Whatever his business was, the Council would hearken to it, and permit the princess to do likewise. For, they reminded themselves, her highness was sworn to take no action that they did not will or warrant.

Therefore, in all the panoply that Burgundy could set forth, the imperial representatives were received, and offered their credentials. They were: Duke Louis of Bavaria, the Lord Bishop of Metz, a lawyer of distinction, George Hesler, and one of the emperor's physicians, William Mortingle.

There followed a breathless moment while the assembly waited for Duke Louis to speak.

"Madame, your royal highness," he said, "and you my lords and gentlemen: Our message is one for which you are well prepared—being none other than his imperial majesty's

reminder that the Duke of Austria, his son, is ready now to consummate with the Lady of Burgundy their marriage, long ago agreed upon between the emperor and your late sovereign."

Anxious though she was, Mary could not help feeling with grim humour what the situation was that she had brought upon her tormentors; could not but relish their angry perplexity as some of them literally and all of them figuratively scratched their polls before venturing to break the tense silence that followed Duke Louis's speech.

Dadizeele was the first to reply. Turning to the princess as if for her permission to be her spokesman, and then to the ambassadors of the emperor, he said:

"My lords: The Estates of her highness, the Duchess of Burgundy, are most deeply honoured by this word from his imperial majesty, the emperor. Our princess has agreed to act, in the important event of her marriage, only in accord with the counsel of her parliament. Many offers of her highness's hand were made, at various times, by her late father—all of them in the reasonable expectation that he would many years survive her marriage, and the hope that he might leave male

issue. The situation of Burgundy and of the princess is much altered by the failure of these hopes. Her Council is endeavouring to advise her well. With profound reverence to his majesty, it begs time to consider——"

"Her highness's promise is given," Duke Louis interposed with hauteur.

Dadizeele lifted a hand to hush those who were too eager to retort. His voice and manner were deferential, placative.

"The pledge of our late sovereign," he began, "can scarcely be held binding to our princess. Duke Charles's understanding must have been that this troth had lapsed——"

Duke Louis was angry.

"The Duke of Austria," he retorted, "had her highness's assurance, a fortnight since."

Every eye turned to Mary.

A hubbub of disorder started.

Mary rose from her seat.

"It is as my lord the duke says!" she cried. "I have given my promise to Prince Maximilian, and summoned you here, my devoted councillors, to ratify that which I have done."

All of those devoted councillors gasped. Then some of them swore, and some of them could not forebear chuckling at their young lady's cleverness, and not a few were relieved—now that the die was cast.

Her highness was quick to feel the change in her status. The affianced of the emperor's heir, after that public acknowledgment of her troth, could not be treated as the defenceless young Lady of Burgundy had been. There would always now be the imperial power to reckon with. But there was this consolation: if the Netherlanders were disappointed, Louis of France would be frenzied. Almost, for the rage this union would cost him, they were willing to forego some of their dreams of aggrandizement.

Mary had private audience that evening with Duke Louis of Bavaria.

"Is, then," she queried ingenuously, after matters of state had been dutifully discussed, "is, then, my lord fully aware to what perplexities he comes in coming to me?"

"Madame," Duke Louis responded in his most elaborate manner, "the eagerness of his highness

to come to his bride is so great that no prospect doth aught but whet his desire."

Raising his head from its low reverence, and his gaze from its humility, Duke Louis encountered the most amazing look he had ever seen in a woman's eyes; it was shrewd in the way that children are ofttimes so shrewd as to confound utterly their wisest elders; and it was wistful in the tenderest fashion of maidenhood; above all, it was compelling in its candour; even an accomplished courtier could scarcely lie to it.

"My lord," the princess said with a simplicity that to Duke Louis seemed great, "sovereigns are over-fed with honeyed words. One sentence that savours of sincerity is above rubies, to a ruler."

She spoke gently; there was appeal in her tone as well as reproach.

Duke Louis was conscious of hurt in that region where, he supposed, his heart had long since ceased to function. This sweet, sensitive girl had sorrow coming to her with her unwilling bridegroom—unless, forsooth—! Ah, well! They were young, and time works many miracles.

He could not find words wherewith to suggest

this. But he had no need to: Mary read it in his face as from an illumined page.

Her lip quivered, and her brown eyes glistened with tears she would not shed. All that she longed further to ask dignity forbade.

"Entreat my lord for me," she said with that abnegation which is the power of strong souls, "that he will not hold himself bounden by a troth made when the prospects of Duke Charles's daughter were far different. If my lord hesitates to plunge into the defence of this troubled realm, he hath my sympathy—and his freedom."

Duke Louis seemed about to protest; but she silenced him.

"In good faith, my lord, I charge you thus. In good faith, I pray you, deliver my message."

CHAPTER XXX

THE BRIDEGROOM COMES

IMMEDIATELY, the duchess-dowager was summoned from Malines to aid the princess in her marriage preparations.

There was no more interdiction on their intimate talk, and they had as much of it as court etiquette and state business would allow. To Margaret, and to her only, Mary told what message she had sent to the Duke of Austria. Margaret, at Malines, had heard rumours of the emperor's insistence and his son's unwillingness. But Margaret still had the feeling that royal matches involved the sacrifice of personal desire; and she was amazed at Mary's action in offering Maximilian release.

"Is it," she said suspiciously, "because of that—other?"

Mary shook her head.

"No! Him I gave up because my country

needed that I should make a powerful alliance. And it was less hard, for that I love him too greatly to bring him into captivity and unhappiness. Nothing can take from me the glory he brought into my life, nor the benefit—in teaching me to love. I think that no soul wakes to life and to eternity and to God, until it has known a supreme love. I know, now, the power of that which is wakened within me—what I can bear and what I can forego. I know that I shall have my love in God's eternal day; and until that day breaks for me I can keep my post of duty, steadfastly.

"I sent that message to my Lord of Austria, because I deem that neither I nor Burgundy needs a defender who would liefer unsheathe his sword in other service."

Margaret stared out of the window and far away.

"Mary," she could only say, "even the kind of acquiescence that you have is not the kind that I can understand."

Tender, almost maternal, was the girl's answering smile. She knew now how many things there were that Margaret could never comprehend.

The wedding preparations went forward. It was necessary for state reasons that they should. The grim thought of the princess, as she directed them, was that after all they might be for Guelders. But she had changed her mind about the penguin. That strange, lonely bird had no responsibilities, and could indulge her preference. She who was born to inherit Burgundy might have to endure Guelders as the Maid of France had to endure the flames. If he proved himself a general able against Louis of France, and if the Duke of Austria came not, Mary might have to make her sacrifice supreme. So the wedding clothes were got ready for what bridal was decreed.

Early in July, word came by breathless couriers from Tournai: Guelders, weary of the siege, had ordered the suburbs beyond the walls of Tournai to be set on fire; thereupon the small French garrison rushed out, engaged the Flemings, and utterly routed them, killing the Duke of Guelders. This was accomplished by a mere handful of three or four hundred men-at-arms; and the complete demoralization they were able to effect among the Flemings induced incalculable arrogance among the French and as incalculable depression among

the Netherlanders—who now began to be exceeding glad that they were to have imperial Germany behind them.

But from imperial Germany no prince-bridegroom came!

July wore away; and in its waning, word came to Duchess Margaret that Maximilian was at Cologne, and there lingering.

Her emissary, whom Margaret had secretly despatched to learn the intentions of the prince, reported that young gentleman as proceeding westward with a small, shabby retinue, and lagging feet.

"It is, your highness, quite commonly reported that our sovereign's bridegroom comes reluctantly. But why, forsooth, I cannot see! The excuse he pleads for tarrying is that he is so meagerly equipped to wed with our princess."

"Return in all haste to Cologne," Margaret ordered, "but let not your haste be evident to him; and convey to him as a gift from his mother-in-law, gold ample for his outfitting."

The heart of her highness during these days was heavy indeed for a bridal, and weary with perplexities.

There were whisperings in Ghent, she knew, but she was past feeling hurt from such stings to her pride.

On a morning in mid-August, a courier brought word that the bridegroom was at Brussels, and would start thence the next day.

Mary, when she heard this, turned very white. She had been thinking of her marriage almost wholly as a state necessity; now, of a sudden, she was intensely conscious of it as a personal relation. It was as when the little Maid, Jeanne d'Arc, in her prison at Rouen, from having thought on her death sublimely as a sacrifice to France, shrunk from it with quivering agony for that it was to be death in the flames.

Not a whisper of this that assailed her came past the lips of the tender young creature who had nursed dreams so transcendent sweet. But Margaret divined it; and, even more understandingly, the Lady Halewyn.

"Dear," Margaret said, venturing to answer that which had not been asked, "canst think what my feelings were when I came here, a child of fourteen, away from all I knew and loved, to be the third bride of the strange warrior duke? Yet

where in all Europe, else, could I have found another who would have more gently and generously treated me. He was good to me far beyond my hopes or my deserts."

Mary looked at her stepmother in a puzzled, weary way. How little Margaret understood!

"You never knew love," she said, simply. And that was all.

That night, Mary sat for hours in her east window, keeping the last vigil of her maidenhood.

"My heart!" she murmured, addressing one who thought her awaiting him where God dwells, "I did not know 'twould be so hard. Here, where the primrose lay that now is on your heart—! These hands that yours enfolded—! These lips through which came rapture into my soul—! . . . God give me strength to bear that which I am undertaking. And oh, my Burgundy! Your love is due to me for this that I pay for your protection."

The calculation was that the bridegroom and his escort would reach Ghent about four or five in the afternoon; but at that time couriers arrived who said the royal entry would not occur before sunset.

Thereupon were given hasty orders for torches.

Supper was served in the palace, with the utmost magnificence; and the princess made what feint she could to conceal her nervousness and preside becomingly at the feast.

She was robed for her betrothed in cloth of silver, fabulously embroidered in pearls. Her mantle was of the same frost-like fabric. Her bosom blazed with diamonds. On her head was a fine white veil flowing above her unbound hair and from beneath the dazzling crown of Burgundy.

In dancing and singing, the evening wore away. Now it was ten o'clock, and the bridegroom still tarried. But his near approach was heralded. He was drawing close to the Porte de Bruxelles, diagonally across the city from the palace. The town throbbed with excitement. None but the very sick were abed. Few houses along the route of the royal procession but were decorated.

Ghent was not beautiful, like Bruges. Its wealth was industrial rather than commercial, and its atmosphere had always been too subject to sudden turbulence to be attractive to the classes of persons who create and sustain beauty. Here and there among the population were travelled,

cultured, æsthetic folk; but their æstheticism derived nothing from the spirit of the community, and persisted in spite of it; whereas, in Bruges, thirty miles away, the love of beauty was almost a religion, as in Florence.

The houses along the narrow streets the prince was to traverse were high and heavy and dark and overhanging—much timbered but little decorated. The wealth of colouring that made Bruges enchanting, was scarcely suggested. But for this occasion the effect was picturesque enough.

Expecting that the royal entry would be in daylight, each dark façade was made gay with banners and long silken strips or streamers of saffron and cinnamon hues; of red like Burgundy wine and topaz like Muscatel; of pomegranate pink and damson purple—exquisite shades dyed and hung under the supervision of Hans Memlinc.

When the light began to fade from the canyon-like streets flaunting these colourings, orders were given for flambeaus to be set in the links beside every doorway, and for lanterns to be hung out wherever possible.

The drawbridge over the moat where the sleeping lilies lay was raised; the portcullis was down.

A warder paced the battlements of the great gateway with its donjon-like defence towers.

The moon was one night past full; the shadows of the tall, sentinel poplars fell like black lances athwart the white road. From his elevation, the warder could see far along the road to the south-east, and catch many a gleam of the silver Scheldt on its winding way to the sea. High over his head in the glittering firmament, that star was still visible which Mary had watched so wistfully since the night she summoned Ezroum.

It was the ear of the watcher that got the first warning of the bridegroom's approach; before his eye caught the faintest, farthest glint of moonlight on spear-points, there was borne to him on the warm breeze the sound of marching feet, of hoof-beats, of the clanking of steel accoutrements. Then, on the white road, between the tall trees that cast the long shadows, the head of the column came into view; archers they were, fourscore of them, part of the escort of honour sent to greet the prince. Big, sinewy fellows, they marched with a pad-pad sound because of their sandal-shod feet. Over their chain-mail and leather cuirasses they

wore mantles of crimson emblazoned in gold with the lion of Burgundy.

Behind them were two hundred pikemen, their spears flashing in the moonlight. Then the Burgundian troopers wearing those mantles of cloth of gold wherewith they had dazzled the emperor and his son at Trèves, four years ago. Next, a great company of knights and nobles from all the realm, each making his utmost show of the magnificence to which Maximilian had come; Louis de Gruuthuuse was among these, and John of Dadizeele, and many scores besides. After them, the bridegroom and his knights and mounted troopers.

From the silver throat of a trumpet blared a signal of approach.

The warder on the walls called out, demanding to know who came.

"His imperial highness, the Duke of Austria, affianced of the Lady of Burgundy."

With a rattling of chains, the drawbridge was let down; and at the same time, the portcullis lifted and the ponderous oaken gates swung wide.

The mayor of Ghent and the town magistrates came out, beyond the walls, to give their welcome. On the mayor's signal, the archers crossed the

drawbridge, with their slightly shuffling tread; then all the others of the Burgundians, halting in the rue de Bruxelles and within the shadows of the gatehouse, until the Duke of Austria had been with due ceremony welcomed to Ghent.

Within the walls were assembled the children, white-clad and garlanded, who had been waiting since mid-afternoon to strew flowers in the royal bridegroom's way. More than a little sleepy they were by this time, for all their excitement; but they fell into line obediently, and cast more rose-leaves in Maximilian's path than he was destined ever again to encounter from the people of Flanders.

At the palace, Memlinc had been busy also, employing in the planning of this spectacle much that he had learned in Italy where the master painters were adept in pageantry for the populace as in altar-pieces for the churches. The spirit of the Medici and other great Italian rulers in making their royal displays an education as well as a delight to every sense of the public had filled Memlinc with ardour to see something similar done in Flanders, and this royal wedding gave him his superb opportunity.

He had staged the reception of the prince in the great court of the palace, an enclosed space wherein several thousand persons could be assembled.

There, against a background of cloth of gold and rich-hued silks and gorgeous Venice velvets, covering almost the whole façade of the east and residential wing, he had caused to be erected a high platform to which a full dozen steps led up from either side. Oriental carpets were laid over all. And on a dais which was raised two steps above the level of the platform floor were two superb gold chairs beneath a canopy of deep amethyst velvet embroidered with the Burgundian and the Austrian coats of arms.

Grouped on this platform Memlinc had, on three outer edges, a line of torch-bearers, each holding high his flaring flambeau; and within the open square the principal members of the royal households. There was a chair of state for Duchess Margaret below the dais.

All around the court stood other torch-bearers, and in ranks before them persons who had been invited to witness the royal entry. Heralds and trumpeters in their colourful splendour had given Memlinc wherewith to do some effective grouping

in the foreground. Banners hung from every window. And over all was the incomparable glory of the firmament.

The fanfare of trumpets in the streets was growing louder; the procession was drawing near.

From a window in the palace that opened on to the platform, the princess stepped. She was accompanied by the duchess-dowager and by a small group of their ladies-in-waiting. Six noble demoiselles bore the long silver train of her highness and disposed it regally about the foot of her throne, when she had taken her stand thereon.

The Lady of Burgundy was lily-pale; and frequently, as she waited, she briefly closed her eyes.

The joyful sounds with which the streets were filled came soaring above the roofs of the palace.

Then the great gates, which the platform faced, were swung open, and amid a welcoming blare the archers entered. Memlinc had them all rehearsed—all but the duke's escort; but, lest any grow confused and spoil his picture, he stood near the entrance, directing. When all were in save only the bridegroom and his immediate retinue, a breathless hush fell upon the many hundreds who needed not the injunction that had been given

them, for in truth it seemed that of its own strain each heart stood still.

As if their silver throats could not express a supremer elation, the trumpets blew a burst of welcome and acclaim—and the prince came riding in.

His mount was a mighty chestnut charger which curvetted superbly as he reined it in. And he who sat this magnificent beast was at first sight accepted by all present as the most beautiful young lord that any had ever beheld. He was armoured in shining silver, but on his head he wore no casque. Nature had crowned him with living gold; and the diadem of pearls and precious stones that bound his flowing locks made him no kinglier-seeming than he had been without it.

A salvo from three thousand throats made the ground tremble. A thousand torches were raised high in air. A thousand spears and swords flashed.

On the dais, a slender figure robed in cloth of silver, swayed like a reed in the wind, and grasped for support at the arm of her gold throne.

Another hush fell as the prince dismounted and approached the steps, which he went up as if he were trembling.

"My lord," her highness murmured, coming a little forward to greet him.

Thereupon that happened of which they never tire telling who love the annals of old Burgundy and of the great empire of the Renaissance: how each of these shining young creatures knelt facing the other, and with bowed heads silently thanked God—the while a faded primrose, worn beneath the silver armour of the prince, may have wondered why the heart against which it lay beat so joyfully.

THE END

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